

'Rise Up addresses the Climate Emergency head on
– driven by the passion of young people.'
Clover Hogan, Force of Nature



RISE UP TO REBOOT THE FUTURE



JONATHON PORRITT

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Cover illustration by Eliz Underhill www.elizunderhilldesign.com

Photographs taken from the Rise Up films

For more information visit www.globaldimension.org.uk/rebootthefuture

Contents

05

Introduction

06

Personal Profiles

11

Chapter 1: 2020

Revisiting 2020 (Looking Back From 2026)
Our Climate Timeline –
What We Achieved in
Those Five Years

27

Chapter 2: 2021

Vaccines,
Pandemic Blues and a
Climate Breakthrough

41

Chapter 3: 2022

Viruses, Jobs and
Climate Disasters

57

Chapter 4: 2023

Sea Ice Melts Down,
Young People Rise Up

72

Chapter 5: 2024

Community Power,
Green Technology, and
the Miracle of Detroit

85

Chapter 6: 2025

Elections, Wellbeing and
a New Climate Treaty

97

Chapter 7: 2020-2025

Looking back on those
Five Impossible Years
(from March 2026)

106

Chapter 8: 2020-2025

The Big Shifts: Progress
in Rebooting Our Future



RISE UP

We've only
got  one

Introduction



APRIL 2026

In her State of the Union Address back in January this year, President Kamala Harris looked back over what she described as the ‘five impossible years’ between 2021 and 2025.

In January 2021, the world was still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic. The global economy was in a terrible mess. For all sorts of reasons, the UK was particularly badly affected. However, as mass vaccination programmes gradually rolled out through the rest of 2021, spirits lifted and economic activity started to pick up.

But even before the pandemic, the world had been in trouble anyway – already battered by the impacts of accelerating climate change and environmental damage, divided by decades of worsening injustice and persistent racial inequality – as highlighted by the emergence of Black Lives Matter in 2020. It was a grim time for a lot of people – and for an awful lot of young people in particular.

Five years on, it’s a very different prospect for young people. Our hopes are much higher for a better world. That’s quite a turnaround.

In a global poll of 100,000 people below the age of 25 carried out in July 2020, 73% agreed with this statement: ‘The world in 2030 will be a great deal worse than it is today.’ That poll has been repeated every year since then. In July 2025, that percentage had fallen to 29%.

So how has that happened?

The three of us are students in our second year at Middlebury College – and you can find out a bit about us in our student profiles. We’re going to try and answer that question, as part of our World Affairs Challenge for this year, with a particular focus on the Climate Emergency.

We’ve called our report Rise Up – after the dramatic events of 2023, which you’ll hear a lot more about in Chapter 4.

“

For it is our hope that
implores us,
at our uncompromising core,
To keep rising up for an Earth
more than worth fighting for

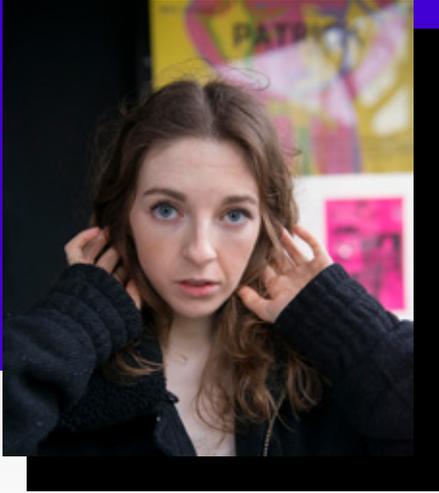
”

Amanda Gorman,
from *Earthrise*

Erin Wilson
Lahari Parekh
Jesse Baldwin

Rise Up

**PERSONAL
PROFILES**



Erin Wilson

My name is Erin Wilson, and I'm 20 years old, born 4th October 2005.

I was born in Grimsby, on the east coast of England, and lived there until I was 14. My mother is a Quality Controller for the supermarket chain Aldi, and my Dad used to work part-time in the fish market in Grimsby – until he walked out on us in 2012. We moved here in 2019 when my Mum got offered a much better job by Aldi.

I started at the High School here that September, but 2020 turned out to be a completely shit year, and not just because of COVID-19. My grandmother had been suffering from Alzheimer's for a couple of years, but it got much worse after we left Grimsby, and Mum had to get her into a care home in January. Then came COVID-19, lockdown, no visits allowed. Grandma contracted the virus in April, and died a week later. My mother still blames herself.

For me personally, the next couple of years turned out to be just as bad, and I totally screwed up my GCSEs. At that point, I 'went off the rails', as they say, left home, but couldn't get any work. I spent quite a bit of time with my grandfather, who'd moved from Grimsby to Norfolk after his wife died. But I was homeless for a while in London. Then, in February 2023, I met someone who was volunteering with an organisation called The Conservation Volunteers, and he persuaded me to join him in supporting a couple of projects in Epping. Best thing ever – absolutely loved it!

In September 2023, I signed on for a BTEC Apprenticeship in Environmental Conservation, which was good – but I wanted to find out a lot more about environmental issues. So now I'm studying Environment and Politics here at the College. I've been involved in climate activism since I was 14, and our politicians' failure to deal with the Climate Emergency has always made me very angry.

I've done Chapters 1 and 7 (looking back to 2020 and looking forward to 2030), as well as Chapter 4, because of my own involvement in Rise Up. More later!



Lahari Parekh

My name is Lahari Parekh. I was born on September 19th 2005, and have lived here all my life, going to James Street Primary and Arkwright Academy – which I really didn't like.

My Dad is an engineer from Mumbai, and came to the UK in 2001 to work for Rolls Royce. Mum grew up in Coventry (her Bangladeshi parents were kicked out of Uganda by the infamous Idi Amin back in 1972), and got into computing at a really young age – she met my Dad when sorting out his IT problems! I have an older brother (who's also in IT, and spends most of his time in Mumbai), and a older sister.

After my A-Levels I went out to Mumbai to stay with my grandparents, who I hadn't seen much of before then. While there, I got very involved in the air pollution campaign (#LetMeBreathe – see page 79), but my asthma got really bad, and I was in hospital for a bit. I spent quite a bit of time volunteering for a community law firm.

Back in the UK, I worked in a restaurant, whilst trying to get what my Dad keeps on calling 'a proper job', before starting at the College in September last year. I'm studying Social Work, as I think I want to go into the social care sector. But I did love my time as a legal volunteer in Mumbai, so who knows?

I love cooking (I've been a vegan for the last six years), and anything to do with food. I still volunteer for a local food cooperative called Incredible Edible.

I've done Chapters 2 and 5 (with the occasional anecdote from Mumbai!)



Jesse Baldwin

My name is Jesse Baldwin. I was born just a few months after the others, in January 2006.

My Dad's a teacher, so we moved around quite a bit when I was younger, but we ended up here in 2016. My Mum's parents were part of the so-called 'Windrush generation', with my grandfather making the passage from the Bahamas in 1967, and grandma coming to join him a year later – somewhat against her better judgement, as she kept telling us throughout her life!

Actually, they couldn't have been happier together, but the way they were treated really upset my mother. She became increasingly bitter about this, and was very involved trying to get justice for those who were most unfairly treated. She was also a teacher (in primary schools), which is how she met my Dad.

His was a bit of a strange life, as he was 'shipped over' to the UK from Boston when he was just three years old, to be brought up by his aunt and her husband. I've never met my grandparents on his side, and he never talks about them. Aunty Selma is now 92, and a real 'matriarch', who's helped me through a lot of dark times. Especially when my Mum died of cervical cancer in 2021. Dad still loves to call himself 'a proud, black American' – he's certainly proud, and certainly black, but absolutely not an American!

Anyway, we both love it here. I did OK in my A-Levels, and got fascinated in the brand new Civics and Community Organising course that the College launched last year. Not sure where that will lead to, but not too worried about that. I guess I'm the one (out of the three of us) who's most interested in climate change, although both Erin and Lahari are more into civil disobedience and protest than I am. I'm also involved in politics, and stood as a candidate for the Council in 2024.

I've taken responsibility for Chapters 3 and 6.



Jay Kantor

And my name is Jay Kantor!

I'm also at the College, and a friend of Erin, Lahari and Jesse. Erin and I both got involved in climate campaigning at around the same time – so she's asked me to do a bit of a retrospective from the point of view of all the campaigners we've worked with over the last six years.

You'll find that Climate Timeline at the end of Erin's first chapter. As you'll see, it's been kind of momentous, in so many different ways. But sad too. All our lives were turned upside down by the death of 46 young campaigners in the Rise Up protests in September 2023. We still live with that.

I'm also on the Environment and Politics course – and on reading through this report, my tutor asked me to try and summarise what all this amounts to in terms of the 'Big Shifts' in society that have been going on over the last five years. What does 'kind of momentous' really mean?! That's all in Chapter 8.

Chapter 1

by Erin Wilson



REVISITING 2020 (LOOKING BACK FROM 2026)

Our Climate Timeline - What We Achieved in Those Five Years



A quick check-in for readers:

1. How old were you in 2020?
2. How well do you remember the first year of the pandemic?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = worst ever/10 = utterly brilliant), how do you rate 2020 looking back on it now from 2026?

The three of us (that's myself, Lahari Parekh and Jesse Baldwin – who you'll hear from in the following chapters) scored it either as a 2 or a 3. For obvious reasons, I guess.

What we recall most vividly is the impact that the virus had on us personally. So many things closed down, stuck at home day after day, well into 2021. Losing touch with friends. Jesse remembers COVID-19 as a dark cloud – 'sometimes lurking on the horizon, sometimes hanging right over our heads, casting shadows over everything else'. We dug out some stuff from our twitter accounts at that time!



 **Erin Wilson**
@erin wilson Follow

Thanks, guys! I could see that you were all really pissed off on the call, but we've got to keep our Strike for the Climate group ticking over somehow. Need to be back in school to go out on strike!!

 98  16 May 12, 2020



 **Lahari Parekh**
@lahari parekh Follow

Bored, bored, bored! Just finished weekly TikTok favs to try and cheer ourselves up – Charli d'Amelio top again, which I think is stupid. Just because she's got more than 100 million followers! Arishfa Khan so much better – even though Tick-Tok still banned by fascist Modi government!

 654  73 Nov 16, 2020



 **Jesse Baldwin**
@Jesse Baldwin Follow

Another wreck of a day, with everyone shouting at each other all day long. The dark cloud settling on us all. All churned up. Nowhere to go. Taking refuge with gospel queen Rachel Kerr!!

 84  10 Nov 21, 2020

For me, it all became a bit surreal. My grandmother died of Covid-19 in April 2020, having just moved into a care home, after which mum became obsessed with the numbers – infection rates, death tolls, different variants of the virus, comparisons between different countries – on and on it went.

So let's get those numbers out of the way quickly. By the end of 2020, there had been 2,280,658 cases of Covid-19, with 72,000 deaths. That number had risen to 128,000 by the end of April 2021, when things began to return to normal.

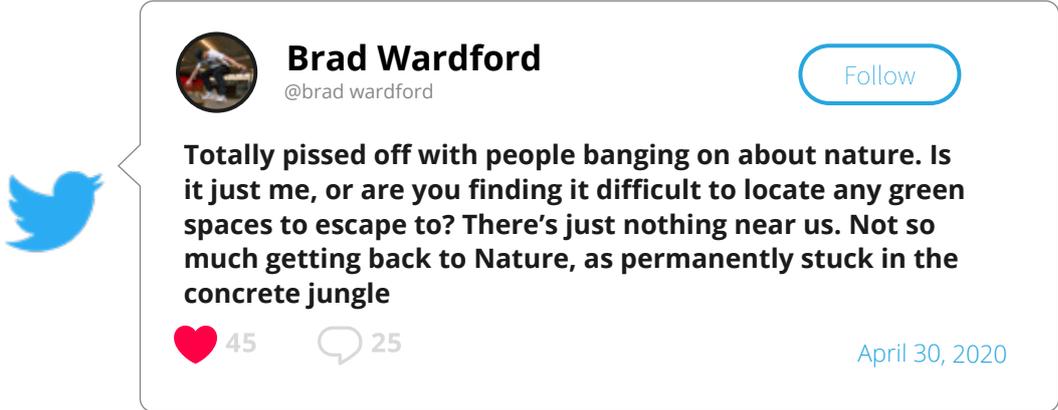
It certainly wasn't all doom and gloom. We learned a lot about what really mattered in our lives, about communities organising things for themselves, about support networks for vulnerable people, about who the 'essential workers' in society really were, about 'living in the truth of how amazing we can be' – I can't remember who said that, but it's stuck with me ever since!

And we learned that messing with the natural world can be bad for our health! As the World Health Organisation keeps on reminding us, more than 75% of new human diseases are caused by viruses and bacteria that originate in other animals – including bats, pigs, birds – you name it! Measles came from cattle; smallpox from camels, the 'Spanish flu' of 1918 (which killed 50 million people!) started off as a virus in birds. All of which should have told us that carrying on destroying the rainforest was one of the stupidest things we could be doing – as we'll see in Chapter 3.



We also learned how utterly disastrous it had been to leave the NHS stretched so thin, even before the onset of COVID-19. No amount of clapping on our doorsteps could make up for that.

Funnily enough, for a lot of people, there was also a sense of reconnecting with the natural world – especially during 2020 - which coincided with some quite beautiful Spring weather. It got harder during the long winter nights at the end of the year and into 2021. But for many people, with no gardens and no access to parks or nice places to walk, stuck indoors day after day, all this ‘nature stuff’ meant very little. As my friend Brad pointed out:

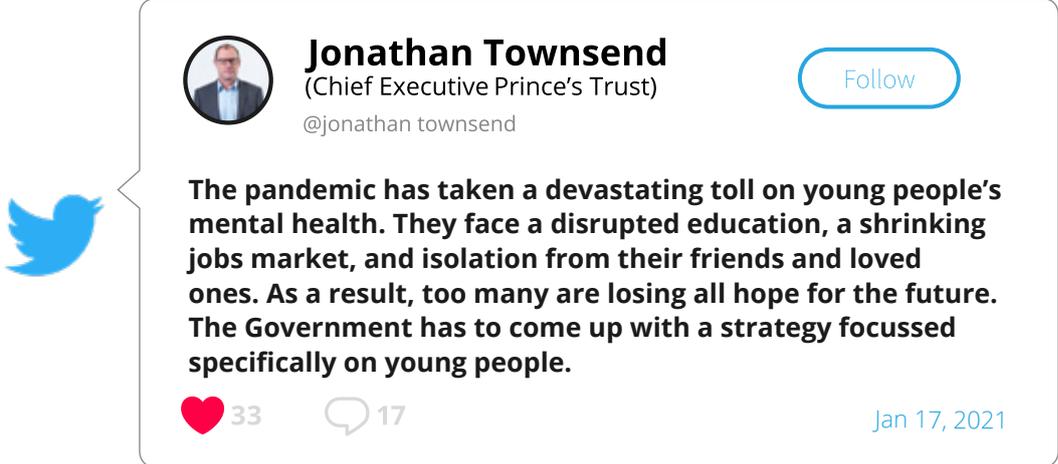


A screenshot of a tweet from Brad Wardford (@brad_wardford) dated April 30, 2020. The tweet text reads: "Totally pissed off with people banging on about nature. Is it just me, or are you finding it difficult to locate any green spaces to escape to? There's just nothing near us. Not so much getting back to Nature, as permanently stuck in the concrete jungle". The tweet has 45 likes and 25 replies. A blue Twitter bird icon is on the left, and a "Follow" button is on the right.

NOT MUCH FUN BEING YOUNG!

Looking back on the last five years, historians often talk of 2020 and 2021 as the two most challenging years for politicians the world over since the Second World War in the 20th Century. Getting the balance right between ‘saving lives’ and ‘protecting livelihoods’, up against a viral enemy ten thousand times smaller than a grain of salt, proved unbelievably difficult. Everyone was desperate to ‘get back to normal’, only for the virus to come surging back. At that time it was only the roll-out of mass vaccination programmes that provided any real hope.

Here in the UK, the costs of managing the crisis just kept on mounting month by month. ‘Protecting existing jobs’ always seemed to take precedence over ‘creating new jobs’. But as unemployment edged upwards week after week (from 5% in October 2020 to 6.5% in June 2021) that became a real problem – especially for young people who were particularly badly affected.



A screenshot of a tweet from Jonathan Townsend (@jonathan_townsend), Chief Executive of Prince's Trust, dated Jan 17, 2021. The tweet text reads: "The pandemic has taken a devastating toll on young people's mental health. They face a disrupted education, a shrinking jobs market, and isolation from their friends and loved ones. As a result, too many are losing all hope for the future. The Government has to come up with a strategy focussed specifically on young people." The tweet has 33 likes and 17 replies. A blue Twitter bird icon is on the left, and a "Follow" button is on the right.

In January 2021, the Prince's Trust Youth Index highlighted the toll on young people's mental health. An astonishing 50% of 16- to 25-year-olds said that their mental health had worsened since the start of the pandemic, with those unemployed significantly more likely to feel anxious and depressed. 25% said they felt 'unable to cope with life'.

I was 15 back then. And that's exactly how it felt.

In some ways, however, young people coped better than a lot of their parents. We were already totally comfortable with our online lives, and all that connectivity just got better and better throughout the pandemic. But my mum and my grandad (stuck on his own in a remote area of rural Norfolk) found it really difficult. All sorts of 'generational divides' going on at the time.

BUILDING BACK BETTER – SORT OF!

At the start of the pandemic, there'd been a huge surge of interest in the idea of 'building back better', ensuring that Government efforts to get the economy back on its feet would prioritise things that directly addressed the Climate Emergency – jobs in home insulation, improving the urban environment and so on.

Unfortunately, this just didn't happen in 2020. There was an ongoing battle between a generation of politicians desperate to return to high levels of conventional economic growth, and those intent on creating a fairer, less environmentally damaging economy. #NoGoingBack.

By the end of the year, Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had promised a couple of billion pounds for a new Green Homes scheme (which was a complete failure, and got ditched in 2021 – see page 49), another couple of billion into helping towns and cities to encourage public transport, cycling and walking (the Active Travel Fund, which really did work), and something like £80 million into conservation and environment initiatives. Compared to France's €30 billion, Germany's €40 billion, and the EU's Green Deal (promising hundreds of billions of euros!), this was seen as little more than 'green peanuts'.

Hardly the Green Industrial Revolution that was endlessly promised by Boris Johnson! But the most important thing was that 2020 ended on a much more positive note as far as renewable energy was concerned. An astonishing 42% of all the electricity we used in 2020 was generated from solar, wind, hydro and biomass. Gas-fired power stations contributed 37%, coal 2%, and the rest came from nuclear power or imports from France.

This really was remarkable! But so few people seemed to understand much about the 'renewables revolution' at that time. Over more than ten years, the price for both solar and wind energy had been coming down and down, as their efficiency improved. Offshore wind proved to be particularly impressive, and the UK led the world then (no longer, sadly!) in terms of the number of wind turbines installed offshore.

Spoiler alert! I shouldn't really be jumping ahead here, but just in case you didn't spot it when the Government released the 2025 figures just a few weeks ago, this is where we now are: renewables 78%; gas 13%; nuclear 9%; coal 0%. Jesse couldn't restrain his excitement!



Jesse Baldwin

@Jesse Baldwin

Follow



Un-bloody-believable - more than three-quarters of our electricity from renewables in 2025! Offshore wind doubling between 2019 and 2025! Last coal-fired power station closed at the end of 2023! Looking ahead, many experts now believe we could be up to 90% of our electricity coming from renewables by 2030 - world-leading or what!!



218



31

Nov 21, 2020

CLIMATE CHANGE IN 2020

Sorry – just getting ahead of myself! Back to 2020, and a quick reminder of just how bad a year it was in terms of accelerating climate change.

As the joint hottest year on record at that time (now, in 2026, only the third hottest!), 2020 was the first year when people woke up to just how bad things were. Unprecedented wildfires in Australia, California, Oregon, Brazil, the Arctic Circle. Appalling flooding in China, India and Bangladesh. The worst ever hurricane season in the Atlantic. The second worst year on record for melting sea ice in the Arctic, etc, etc.



Dermot O’Gorman

WWF Australia

@DermotOz

Follow



Australian Government forced to concede that more than two billion animals killed by wildfires at the start of the year. Hardly surprising with 11.5 million hectares destroyed – roughly the size of England! But Ministers still unmoved. Still stuck in the era of fossil fuels. So we’d better prepare for worse to come.



283



127

Jul 1, 2021

Those were just the headlines. In some respects, the reality was even worse. It was crazy just trying to keep up with what was happening. The numbers of people seriously affected by heatwaves kept on rising. Scientists were warning that the melting rates on both the Greenland ice cap and in Antarctica were still accelerating. And in October, a survey ship in the Laptev Sea in the Russian Arctic recorded ‘very high levels’ of methane, bubbling up from the ocean floor because of rising temperatures across the entire Arctic Circle. And as we all know now, only too well, methane is bad, bad news – as one of those warming gases in the atmosphere, that is so much more powerful than carbon dioxide.



Greta Thunberg

@GretaThunberg

Follow



'We need to step up our game', all our leaders keep saying. Well then, please go ahead! No more blah, blah, blah! You don't need UN Summits, Treaties or 'deals' to start lowering emissions. Nor do you need to wait for anyone else. You can start right this second. No-one is stopping you!

12.1k 207

November 2020

And for all of us who had been involved in the School Strikes in 2019, this was hard. Pretty much all our campaigning work ground to a halt in 2020. The contrast between what was being done to address the immediate public health emergency of COVID-19, 'in our faces' at that time and killing thousands of people around the world every day, and what was being done to address the Climate Emergency, still seen then by most politicians as a 'challenge for tomorrow', could not have been starker.

There was meant to have been a big climate change conference at the end of 2020 (the so-called Conference of the Parties, or COP26, in Glasgow), but it got delayed because of COVID. So young people around the world stepped into the breach to organise their very own Mock COP. 330 young climate activists from 140 countries got together online for two weeks to come up with a brand new Climate Treaty.



Maninder Bal

@maninderbal

Follow



All of us involved in Mock COP want to say, once again, to all policy-makers that young people across the world are tired of empty climate promises. We, the world's youth, are ready to work with you in building a self-reliant, safe, inclusive and sustainable world. The question is, are you ready?

63 29

December 1, 2020

SANITY RESTORED: TRUMP KICKED OUT OF THE WHITE HOUSE!

One of the most energising elements about Mock COP was the supercharged presence of young climate activists from the USA. Donald Trump was on his way out of the White House, and Joe Biden on his way in! Many young people's organisations had played a huge part in the Presidential Election itself, getting young people registered and getting them to turn out on the day.

Just in case you can't recall what it felt like at the time, it's worth reminding ourselves that the Election of President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris brought to an end the worst four years in modern American history. All democracies depend on some kind of 'social contract' between an elected government and its citizens. Trust lies at the heart of that social contract. President Trump spent four years cultivating trust with some American citizens, while undermining it with all the rest. And we all remember where that led – to the shocking, shameful events of January 6th 2021, when a mob of fervent Trump supporters attacked the United States Capitol in one last desperate attempt to stop the results of President Biden's Election triumph being ratified. Five people died. Trump was impeached, for the second time. But there just weren't enough votes in the Senate to find him guilty.



Photo Credits to Shutterstock

In his inaugural speech, just a couple of weeks later, President Biden acknowledged, right off the bat, that rebuilding that trust – with all US citizens – would be his first task. Including the massive challenge of deep-seated racial inequality.

It was a great speech, but nothing like as moving as the amazing poem from Amanda Gorman, America's first ever Youth Poet Laureate, which became something of an anthem for all young people from that time on:

'We are striving to forge our union with purpose.
To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters, and conditions
of man.
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first, we must first put
our differences aside.
We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.
We seek harm to none and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew.
That even as we hurt, we hoped.
That even as we tired, we tried.
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious.
Not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again
sow division.'

SEEKING JUSTICE

'Racism is built into America's DNA'. Jesse and I (with very different cultural backgrounds) have spent hours trying to make sense of that comment over the last few weeks. I know things are bad here in the UK, but it's been extraordinary for me to discover how institutionalised racism is present at every level of government in the US, denying Black people access to social, economic and environmental justice. Over the years, many Presidents have done little if anything to challenge that post-slavery legacy, but having an out-and-out white supremacist like Donald Trump in the White House was something different.

Just as 2019 gave birth to the whole School Strikes movement, inspiring enormous numbers of young climate activists, so 2020 saw the dramatic impact of #BlackLivesMatter, following the brutal death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police on 25th May. This sparked a global movement, outraged not just at the hateful racism in the US police and prison systems, but at persistent racial inequality in so many countries, in so many walks of life.



This made the 'summer of racial reckoning' that followed George Floyd's death all the more significant, including here in the UK. The toppling in Bristol of the statue of Edward Colston, a prominent slave trader in the 17th Century, was a moment of intense reckoning, the memory of which has empowered campaigners against racial inequality throughout the last five years.

There's little doubt that institutionalised racism in the UK led to COVID-19 having a bigger impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. As Doreen Lawrence put it at the time: 'The impact of COVID-19 on BAME citizens is not random. It is the consequence of decades of structural injustice, inequality and discrimination that blights our society.' This was reflected in the final mortality figures, with BAME citizens at least twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as white citizens – with much of that accounted for by economic circumstances and underlying health conditions.

“

The impact of COVID-19 on BAME citizens is not random. It is the consequence of decades of structural injustice, inequality and discrimination that blights our society.

”

Doreen
Lawrence



Looking back on that time, it was a hell of a list of things to face up to, and I honestly don't think most adults had even begun to understand what was going on amongst young people.

It was like one thing after another. The pandemic. Mental health issues. Poor housing. Rising unemployment. #BLM. News about climate change that just got more and more depressing.

But did all that make it a uniquely awful time (in the modern era) to be a young person growing up in the UK? We've honestly no idea – we're not historians, after all! But it certainly wasn't great. Looking back at some of the polls done during 2020 and 2021, up to 70% of 18-24 year olds reported feeling some kind of 'eco-anxiety'.

This forced a lot of us to start thinking about why so many things seemed to be going wrong all at the same time. We just seemed to be stuck in an economic system that made it impossible to do the right thing by each other. That always put economic growth before a stable climate and a clean environment. That always 'put profit above people, greed above need', as Prince Ea put it in his Apology to Future Generations, 'that always put the rule of gold above the Golden Rule' – which means treating people the way you would want to be treated by them. [Watch here](#)

COVID-19 shone a very bright light on all of that. It made it impossible to conceal some very harsh truths about our economy and about the sheer, grinding unfairness of it all. But it also gave us hope that we could start to do things very differently once we'd learned to live with the wretched virus.

And I guess that's why the three of us scored 2020 either 2 or 3 out of 10. We didn't actually know each other then, but realise now (in doing this project!) that we each developed our own 'survival strategies' throughout 2020 and 2021.

For instance, Lahari told us that she and her parents had made a great big poster out of these words and stuck it on their living room wall:

‘HISTORICALLY, PANDEMICS HAVE FORCED HUMANS TO BREAK WITH THE PAST AND IMAGINE THEIR WORLD ANEW. THIS ONE IS NO DIFFERENT. IT IS A PORTAL, A GATEWAY BETWEEN ONE WORLD AND THE NEXT. WE CAN CHOOSE TO WALK THROUGH IT, DRAGGING BEHIND US THE CARCASSES OF OUR PREJUDICE AND HATRED, OUR AVARICE, OUR DATABANKS AND DEAD IDEAS, OUR DEAD RIVERS AND SMOKY SKIES. OR WE CAN WALK THROUGH LIGHTLY, WITH LITTLE LUGGAGE, READY TO IMAGINE ANOTHER WORLD. AND READY TO FIGHT FOR IT.’

- ARUNDHATI ROY

That was written by someone called Arundhati Roy, a famous writer and environmental campaigner.

So, five years on, have we been able to walk through that portal? That will be for you to judge - once we bring everything up to date at the end of 2025!

OUR CLIMATE TIMELINE: WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN THOSE FIVE YEARS

By Jay Kantor



Many thanks to Erin for giving me a crack at thinking about the last five years from a climate activist's perspective. Two quick points:

1. What I love about this Rise Up report is the way it weaves together so many of the things going on in our lives in the last five years, not just here in the UK, but in the US, India, China, Brazil and so on. And not just climate stuff. But the most powerful narrative thread is around climate campaigning, which is why we're summarising it here.
2. Back in 2020, there wouldn't have been many commentators predicting that it would be young people who finally got the world on track to face up to the Climate Emergency properly. But that's what happened.

This summary includes some of the high points, some of the low points. Tragedy and joy. The improbable and the inevitable.

2019 and 2020: You don't need me to go back over this old ground in any detail.

2019: Inspired by School Strikes for Climate and Fridays for Future, young climate activists helped shift the needle. Politicians really started listening.

2020: COVID-19 puts an end to all that. Impossible to sustain any of the momentum built up in 2019.

2021: This was such an important year for the climate, with the UN's big Climate Conference

(COP26) coming at the end of the year in Glasgow. Expectations were running high, given that not much had changed since the equivalent Conference in Paris back in 2015. 'Six years of kicking the can down the road', as Erin puts it!

By the middle of the year, things weren't looking all that good for COP26, despite massive pressure from scientists, business leaders, NGOs and so on. So young people got back into action! Huge protests around the world in July (400,000 young people involved here in the UK alone) with a simple message to the politicians: GET IT DONE - PLEASE!

And they did – sort-of. As in all world leaders signing up in principle to the idea of a Net Zero carbon economy by 2050. Including China and India.

2022: This turned out to be a hellish year in terms of accelerating climate change. July saw six separate disasters – pretty much bankrupting the global insurance industry. As is often the way with disasters, this led to some big breakthroughs, particularly in the USA, driven by young people's climate campaigns – it wasn't recognised at the time, but President Biden's Low Carbon Prosperity Act turned out to be a serious game-changer.

Elsewhere, that bloody can kept on getting kicked down the road! All those Net Zero commitments signed up to in 2021 stayed just that way: commitments, not actions. COP27 in Cairo was another massive disappointment.

2023: As we all know, this was the year when everything changed – after so much deeply immoral dithering and delay.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (set up by governments to advise governments) brought out its latest Assessment Report, bringing together all our worst fears in one devastating summary, focusing particularly on melting ice in the Arctic and Antarctic and on the implications for rising sea levels. 'No less than one metre by 2100, and possibly much, much worse than that.'

That brought together every single young campaigners' organisation all around the world. In September, #RestOfOurLives turned into the huge Rise Up protests.

While the world looked on in shock, a tragic sequence of events led to the deaths of 46 young climate activists.

That moment is still seared into all our minds – and has shaped all of our work since then.

COP28 in Detroit came just a few weeks after that tragedy. Acting on a direct mandate from the UN Security Council (riven by guilt, finally, at what its 30-year failure to act meant for young people), world leaders at COP28 agreed that trying to eliminate emissions of greenhouse gases on a voluntary basis had proved to be the equivalent of a 'collective suicide note' for humankind.

In what became known as 'the Miracle of Detroit', they signed up to the idea of a binding international treaty, with sanctions to be applied to all countries that failed to play their part in addressing the climate crisis.

2024: What all four of us remember most about the start of 2024 is exhaustion, grief, and

a kind-of low-level anger: did 46 beautiful, passionate young people really have to die to get world leaders to do what they should have been doing for decades?

So it was an odd time. Even as the climate disasters kept coming at us thick and fast, our focus shifted to local action. There was a massive emphasis on air pollution (there are still around eight million people dying of air pollution every year!) which Lahari writes about so movingly.

The utterly brilliant Good Ancestors Project brought tens of millions of grandparents onto the streets at a silent vigil for the 46 on September 17th – the first anniversary of Rise Up. And don't tell me that wasn't a major factor in the election of Kamala Harris as President of the United States in November that year!

COP29 was in Beijing. All those world leaders had no choice but to honour the pledges they'd made the year before in Detroit – so the draft text for the International Climate Emergency Treaty (INCET) was finally agreed.

2025: No need to dwell too much on this as it's all such 'recent history'. There was a lot going on: coal-fired power stations closing down everywhere, wind and solar breaking records on a weekly basis, electric vehicles outselling petrol and diesel cars in more and more countries, meat consumption continuing to decline, so-called 'nature-based solutions' to climate change beginning to have a real impact. But still nothing like enough. All too slow!

It was probably inevitable that some big countries would start pushing back against a legally-binding treaty. By the middle of the year, they were still bickering away, just as they'd been doing for the last 30 years. So in July, #StillRisingUp started mobilising for yet more protests and school strikes, leading to 70 million young people out on the streets of more than a thousand cities in September. I think they got the hang of it at that point: we were not going away, ever again!

As you probably remember, COP30 at the end of the year was in Rio de Janeiro. One simple headline: 'New Climate Treaty Adopted!'

And one action agreed: 'Emissions of greenhouse gases to be halved by 2032!'

A MASSIVE step forward.

Chapter 2: 2021
By Lahari Parekh



**VACCINES, PANDEMIC
BLUES, AND A CLIMATE
BREAKTHROUGH**



VACCINATION DAYS

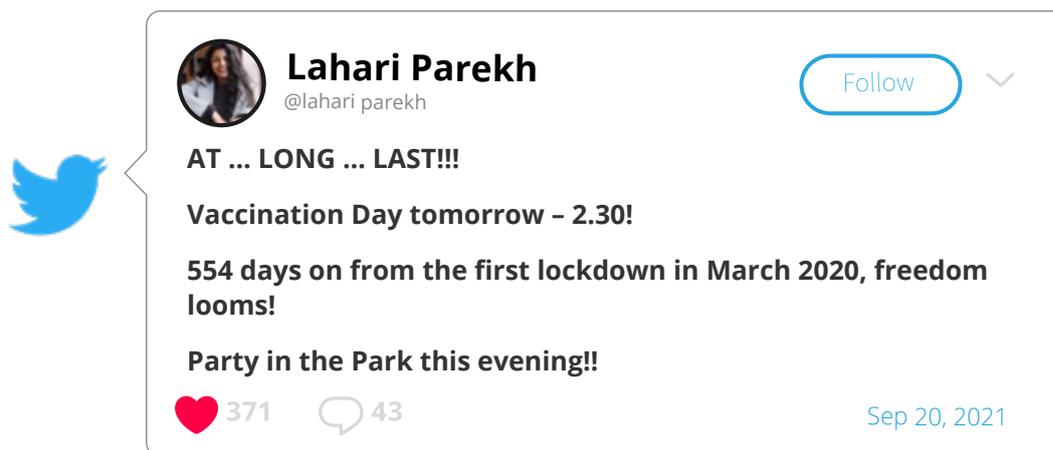
If 2020 was all about the virus (or variants of the virus), 2021 was all about the vaccines. Astonishingly, the 'miracle' of a range of vaccines that might once have taken nine years to develop becoming available within nine months had soon been taken for granted. From that point on, it was all about rolling them out just as fast as possible.

Even more astonishingly, the UK turned out to be rather good at this! 15 million people (in all the most vulnerable groups) were vaccinated by the end of February. And all adults by the middle of June. And the rest of us by the end of October – apart from those who were either vaccine-sceptics or out-and-out anti-vaxxers.

But that turned out to be more of a problem for Joe Biden than for Boris Johnson. Throughout 2021, the US VaxWars ranged back and forth. Everything in America becomes part of their never-ending culture wars, including wearing masks and getting vaccinated. Democrats – yay! Republicans – nay! (Out of curiosity, I tried to find out relative death rates between Democrats and Republicans, but for some reason nobody seems to have done that calculation!)

Anyway, pretty much every US adult who wanted to be vaccinated was vaccinated by the end of June, with the Biden administration using all its federal muscle to overcome huge barriers in both vaccine production and distribution. A massive win for science – and for Joe Biden.

Here in the UK, it was all about how long we each had to wait for our very own Vaccination Day! Young people, obviously, were at the end of the queue (being 'young, healthy and relatively happy', as Boris Johnson so patronisingly put it when congratulating A-Level students on their 'world-beating fortitude and resilience' in July that year – what was that guy on at the time?!), but September 21st was indeed a pretty big day for me! It was just so much easier to look forward without the horizon being shrouded in COVID gloom.



So things were looking a lot better by the end of 2021. But many people's nagging feelings of fear and uncertainty took a long time to disappear.

And then there was Long COVID – with people suffering from chronic fatigue, memory loss, brain fog, breathlessness, hearing and eyesight problems, muscle pain, headaches – and sometimes much worse. 20% of COVID sufferers still had symptoms after a month, and 10%

after three months. For some, the symptoms have never completely gone away, including quite a lot of young people. Not just Long COVID, but 'Life Sentence COVID', adding to the hundreds of thousands of people in the UK already affected by ME/chronic fatigue syndrome.

It took a while for the politicians to realise just how serious this was, and to come to terms with the extra burden that it put on the NHS at that time. The records now show that nearly three quarters of a million people were affected by Long COVID.

REVOLUTIONISING HEALTH CARE

For years and years, critics of healthcare policies in the UK had pointed out the absurdity of devoting the vast majority of available money and resources to sorting people out after they had got sick. Back in 2020, we were spending just 2% of our total health budget on public and preventative healthcare – ie stopping people getting sick in the first place. Everybody knew this was crazy, but no single government, over more than 40 years, had been able to crack the problem.

From 2021 onwards, however, that began to change. Jumping ahead a bit, Department of Health figures from last year (2025) show that nearly 6% of expenditure was devoted to public health – a tripling in just five years.

Those are just the official statistics – which don't really mean very much. The real story here is about billions of pounds going into better diets, healthier lifestyles, better health education, improved housing, access to green spaces and cleaner environments. And all of this had such a positive impact on the lives of young people, particularly on young people from disadvantaged communities.

All that was so long overdue – the situation back in 2021 was really shocking. I had to double-check the figures, as they seem literally incredible today. When the new school year started in September 2021, a headline-grabbing report from the Child Poverty Action Group revealed that child poverty in the UK, post-pandemic, was at its highest level ever, with 4.6 million children living in poverty, up from 4.2 million in 2020. 48% of children in single-parent families were in poverty (up from 44% in 2020). Black and Minority Ethnic children were almost twice as likely to be living in poverty as children in White British families. And a startling 650,000 children were turning up at school every day without having had a proper breakfast – many of whom hadn't eaten properly the night before either.



4.6 million children living in poverty



48% of children in single-parent families were in poverty



Black and Minority Ethnic children were almost twice as likely to be living in poverty



650,000 children don't have a proper breakfast

Even the ever-polite Marcus Rashford went ballistic on that one:



That shook things up! MPs of all parties were suddenly falling over themselves to focus on this shameful reality – still going on in one of the world's richest nations. Four years on (jumping ahead again!) this was the story at the end of 2025:

- 2.8 million children living in poverty, down from 4.6 million.
- 31% of children in single-parent families still in poverty, down from 48%.
- Gap between BAME and White children living in poverty significantly reduced.
- Just 75,000 children not getting a proper breakfast.

That's a whole lot of kids whose lives have been improved since the pandemic. Question: would it have happened without the pandemic? Who knows. Personally, I very much doubt it, simply because COVID-19 shone a very bright light on a lot of the cruel and crazy things going on in the UK at that time, which people just seemed prepared to put up with – including those decades of under-investment in public health and healthy lifestyles.

HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES

It was the same sort of story with obesity. Evidence of the direct links between COVID-19 and obesity were crystal clear by the end of 2020. It was found that obese people were twice as likely to be hospitalised. The more obese a person was, the greater the risk of them dying. All to do with the negative impacts of obesity on people's respiratory and cardiovascular systems, as well as on their immune systems. This proved to be pretty standard in all countries. But it had a much bigger impact in the UK, where 28% of adults at that time were obese and a further 36% overweight.

It turns out that the UK's first Obesity Strategy had been launched back in 1991! But things kept on getting worse, year after year, for one simple reason: it's no good the Department of Health trying to reduce obesity if every other Government Department is hell-bent on promoting policies and lifestyles that make it even more likely that people become obese – in terms of food policy (permitting ludicrous levels of sugar in thousands of products, for instance), planning policies (always putting the interests of car owners before cyclists and pedestrians), limiting controls on advertising to children, and so on.

Here's what was really mad – I mean MAD! – about this: back in 2020, treating obesity-related ill health cost the NHS around £6bn a year, with knock-on costs to society of around £27bn. £6bn was bad enough in pre-COVID times; post-COVID, with the NHS struggling to clear the backlog of routine operations, to reduce waiting lists, to rebuild its cancer and coronary services, this was seen as obscenely wasteful.

Under growing pressure the Government introduced a new Obesity Action Plan in November 2021, with much stricter controls on sugar content, a dramatic increase in the Sugar Tax (first introduced at a ridiculously low level in 2018), and a total ban on advertising unhealthy food products at any time of the day. For a while, it looked as if the Government might introduce a levy on all fast food outlets that failed to offer healthier choices, but this got knocked back by a rearguard action amongst Tory MPs.

The good news is that all this is at last beginning to have an impact, with encouraging reductions in the numbers of both obese and overweight people in the last couple of years.

But a much bigger impact has come about because of changes in transport policy and urban planning, dramatically reduced car use, with correspondingly huge increases in the number of journeys done by bike or on foot. This led to all sorts of good things: improved air quality and fewer people suffering respiratory problems (with knock-on benefits in terms of reduced health expenditure); significantly reduced emissions of greenhouse gases from cars and other vehicles; more streets closed to cars and given back to people and communities, with far more children able to play outside than had been the case for decades. Even in our car-bound town, you can really see the change – and for people like me it's been brilliant. My asthma is just so much better!



One day's filth from Lahari's windowsill in Mumbai!

Now – take a deep breath. It's hard for us today to believe that air pollution was responsible for around forty thousand premature deaths in the UK, every year, back in 2020. FORTY THOUSAND! But it was only in December that year that people really woke up to this. A coroner's verdict on the death of a nine year old girl called Ella Kissi-Debrah linked her death directly to the appalling levels of air pollution where she lived in South East London. 'I conclude that Ella died of ashthma, contributed to by exposure to excessive air pollution.' Time after

time, the UK Government had been found to be in breach of its legal obligations to ensure clean air, but did literally nothing about it. Forty thousand deaths, but NOTHING DONE!

(Sorry – us asthma sufferers are still pretty fired up by this stuff!)

This may not be such a big deal in a few years' time. You'll all know that the vast majority of people below the age of 25 in the UK (and in the rest of Europe) don't have a car. And few of us aspire any longer to own a car! Why would we? It gets easier and easier to get around in our towns and cities, without all the hassle and cost of owning a car. (It's still not that easy to do without a car in rural areas, which remains a big problem, given how bad public transport still is.)

Policies to promote active lifestyles and 'integrated transport' were already commonplace in hundreds of European cities and towns before the pandemic. But our government only got serious about this after the pandemic.



Under growing pressure from campaigners, Boris Johnson and the Chancellor of the Exchequer eventually woke up to the fact that their plans to spend £27bn on building new roads weren't going to help much in terms of delivering new jobs, and was probably one of the most stupid things that they could be doing if they were serious about becoming 'the world's most sustainable, zero carbon economy in the world' – this being one of Boris Johnson's favourite mantras throughout 2021! Over the next four years, at least 60% of that £27bn was redirected to investments in public transport, broadband and smart digital infrastructure, as well as improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.



Picture by Andrew Parsons / No10 Downing Street

Joined-up thinking?

In a lot of towns and cities (including ours), Council leaders and mayors took matters into their own hands, pushing through local plans to prioritise use of road space for buses, taxis, e-bikes and e-scooters, cyclists and pedestrians, as well as to introduce congestion-charging schemes – of which there are now 17 in the UK's towns and cities. There were just two back then. Taxis and car-share schemes were regulated much more strictly, and knowing that the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles was to be completely banned in 2030 (undoubtedly one of the best decisions taken by Boris Johnson back in 2020!), all such schemes had to be pure electric vehicles or advanced hybrids.

Not everybody went along with this – and there were lots of protests throughout 2021. Jeremy Clarkson, a veteran petrol-head back in the day, set up a new organisation, 'Right to Drive', in July 2021. But it never got anywhere. Our towns and cities were beginning to look and feel very different, and most people really liked it that way.

This was made a lot easier because levels of pre-COVID commuting simply never came back. To start with, many people remained nervous about going on public transport even after the vaccination programmes kicked in properly. And after months and months of a lot of people working from home during the pandemic, more flexible working arrangements became commonplace – with as many benefits for employers as for employees.

THE LATEST SURVEY CARRIED OUT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT (AT THE END OF 2024) SHOWED A MASSIVE 31% REDUCTION IN PASSENGER KILOMETRES FOR PEOPLE COMMUTING IN THE UK (IE TRAVELLING BACK AND FORTH TO THE SAME PLACE OF WORK ON A REGULAR BASIS) SINCE 2020. AND THOSE NUMBERS WILL NEVER GO BACK UP AGAIN.

UNEMPLOYED – AND ALL OUR FAULT APPARENTLY!

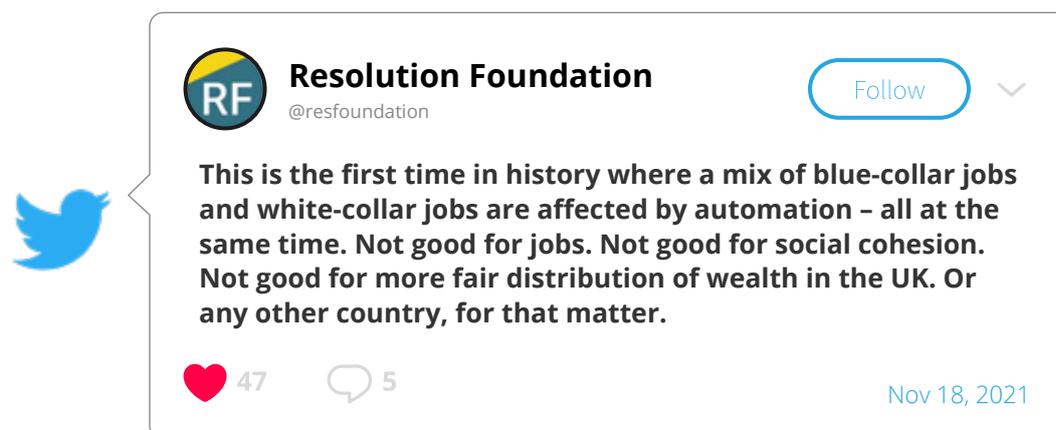
So there were a lot of people in 2021 whose work/life balance was greatly improved. But overall unemployment was still up at 6.5% by the end of the year. And there was a much bigger crisis within that crisis. 16% of young people in the UK between the ages of 18 and 24 (and not in education) were out of work, triggering endless hand-wringing about COVID's

'lost generation'. (In some places, it was as high as 40%). Another 26% were working part-time or on zero-hour contracts. Some because that's the way they liked it, but the majority because that was the only work they could get. The gig economy just kept on growing.

One thing that seemed to take the experts by surprise was the extraordinary acceleration on a global basis in automation – made possible by super-smart robots, big data and Artificial Intelligence (AI). A lot of companies that had only just managed to survive in 2020 brought forward their investments in automated manufacturing and logistics. They described it as 'making their companies more resilient'. By the end of 2021, multinational companies had laid off millions of manufacturing jobs in China, India, South-East Asia and Mexico, as well as here in Europe and the USA.

Every year, more factories, warehouses and distribution centres went 'dark', with everything automated apart from the supervisors and maintenance staff. Worse yet, I don't think many people recognised the significance of Amazon opening its first 'Just Walk Out' grocery store in London in March of that year, allowing shoppers just to pick items off the shelf, with the bill automatically charged to their Amazon account. Since then, more and more shops have gone 'virtual', getting rid of tills altogether, with all purchases scanned and paid for electronically.

The shelf-stackers are still needed, of course. And security guards. But it's been yet another blow to the high streets of many towns and cities.



A lot of economists at that time seemed to think that at least as many new jobs would be created as would be lost. I wonder if they seriously believed what they were saying? It was pretty much at that moment that white-collar jobs also began to disappear in the same AI-driven storm – jobs in accountancy, in legal and other professional services, in the financial sector, even in journalism, advertising and marketing. It's true that Big Tech (Google, Amazon, Facebook and so on) kept on getting bigger and bigger, creating many new jobs, but even that couldn't possibly soak up all the jobs lost through automation.

We were all just sixteen at the time, and it really did feel like a bit of a 'perfect storm': the post-COVID-19 economic downturn, a lot of mental health problems, accelerated automation, with the retail and hospitality sectors particularly badly affected – places where so many of us would traditionally get our first jobs. Competition for every single new job was insane!

All this forced a whole lot of young people to start coming up with their own ideas. Amazingly,

government statistics tell us that people between the ages of 18 and 25 set up more than twice the usual number of new enterprises and organisations in 2021 and 2022. With so much having moved online anyway, this really played to our strengths.

For all that, there was growing anger that government didn't seem to understand the particular pressures on us. Some people even tried to make out it was somehow all our fault, blaming us for just being young and still trying to have a bit of fun! There were a lot of clashes in the media over the next couple of years – in what became known as 'the War of the Ages'. This was a pretty typical headline from that time, after the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a big new scheme to get young people into new apprenticeships and training schemes:



PICKING UP THE PACE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

As it happens, The Daily Mail had even more to complain about when young people put themselves back on the front line of climate campaigning that same year.

Looking back from 2026, it's probably difficult for you to remember what it was like back in 2019, when millions of young people around the world were involved in school strikes or protest marches. The onset of the pandemic in March 2020 brought that movement to an almost complete standstill, not just because COVID-19 made it impossible to organise large (or even small!) gatherings, but because so many young people were struggling to cope with being stuck at home, with the whole exams fiasco, and so on.

But 2021 turned out to be quite a year from a climate perspective. The usual spate of shock-horror reports about the climate telling us that things were getting even worse, even faster. Endless Government announcements, making all the right noises. Companies more and more focused on being seen to be doing the right thing – half-way through the year, it was reported that 25 of the world's largest companies had announced Net Zero targets (to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases) for 2050 or even earlier. A few had even got their shareholders to approve these plans at their Annual General Meetings, following in the footsteps of Unilever, one of the world's largest Fast-Moving Consumer Goods companies, on May 5th that year.

All of which meant that the world's biggest energy companies were forced onto the back foot. Even the oil and gas companies began to see 'the zero-carbon writing on the wall' as Bernard Looney, BP's CEO since 2019, put it in a tweet on May 18th after getting a mauling from shareholders at its AGM:



Bernard Looney

@Bernard Looney

Follow

'This is hard for our shareholders, but today's climate science tells us that the world needs to be out of oil and gas much sooner than we once thought necessary if we're going to avoid runaway climate change. BP is going to play its part in that - and shareholders should be reassured that we will be generating more profits for them from renewables (and other non-fossil-fuel businesses) than we do from oil and gas - by 2035.'



55



18

May 18, 2021

It's easy to forget just how revolutionary a statement that was! Over the next few years, it all became a bit of a 'race to the exit' for fossil fuels, with all the big independent oil and gas companies desperate not to be the last to make the move.

So there was already a lot to celebrate in the run-up to the Climate Conference - or Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow - in November. Renewable energy breaking records, all over the world, month after month. The USA properly back in the climate game after Joe Biden's election in 2020. The EU focused on its massive Green Deal.

And China coming under growing pressure to get its act in order as the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases. In fact, by the time delegates started gathering in Glasgow, pretty much every country in the world had made a 'Net Zero' declaration of one kind or another.

QUICK EXPLAINER: WHAT IS ALL THIS COP STUFF?

Way back in 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, world leaders signed up to a new global treaty - the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It was ratified just two years later in 1994. And pretty much every year since then, all Parties to that Convention get together at the end of the year to try and move things forward, with each Conference of the Parties taking place in a different city.

Frankly, if you look objectively at what's happened since 1992, you have to ask exactly what they were doing all that time! In 1992, emissions of greenhouse gases stood at 22 billion tonnes of CO₂e¹. By 2020, that had increased to around 45 billion tonnes. There was a big drop in 2020 because of the pandemic, but emissions started going straight back up again in 2021!

Back in the 1990s, we still had a real chance of limiting temperature increases to maintain a safe and stable climate. Even the famous Paris Agreement in 2015 didn't really achieve anything. Countries made lots of promises about what they were planning to do by 2030 or 2050, but when the experts totted up all of those promises, the result would still have been an average temperature increase of more than 3°C by the end of the century. Which would mean a complete climate meltdown.

¹ CO₂ is the most important of all the gases that contribute to global warming. Some have a bigger warming effect than others. The little 'e' in 'CO₂e' stands for 'equivalent' - and provides a combined figure for all the different gases.

With all the new commitments made in 2020 and 2021 (from the UK, USA, China, Japan, South Korea, the EU and so on), it was reckoned that it might just about be possible to stay below 2°C, judged by scientists to be the absolute maximum for there to be any chance at all of a stable climate by the end of the century.

Despite all that, it still looked as if COP26 could be just another exercise in ‘kicking the climate can down the road’. If anything, the focus on 2050 seemed to have let politicians off the hook, giving them an excuse to avoid focusing on hard-edged reductions over the next ten years rather than over the next 30. By the middle of the year, even here in the UK, there was nothing to indicate an emergency response to match the scale of the Climate Emergency – and we are definitely one of the better countries!

BACK INTO ACTION

All three of us remember that time well. And as I said, for young people involved in climate campaigning, it was a particularly difficult time after all the incredible breakthroughs we’d made in 2019. A lot of stuff was still happening online, but it just wasn’t the same.

But none of our anger had gone away. None of our passion. None of our determination to force politicians and business leaders to recognise the shocking immorality of condemning all young people to a literal HELL ON EARTH for the rest of our lives.

And that got us all going again. All the main youth organisations got together, and issued the following ‘call to action’ on June 8th:



Strike4Climate

@Strike4Climate

Follow



‘It’s not working. Our politicians are still fudging it. Endless false promises. Empty words. Business as Usual. This is a TOTAL BETRAYAL. We’ve got to turn things round before COP26 in November.’

1.2k 772

Jun 8, 2021



Strike4Climate

@Strike4Climate

Follow



‘Our next Strike4Climate has been rescheduled for Friday July 16th. We need it to be the biggest ever. Gather in Parliament Square at 11am, for those who can get there safely. Otherwise, outside your own City or Town Hall, Council Chambers, Parish Hall or whatever. As ever, properly socially distanced, masks still advised – even if restrictions are now easing. And always watching out for each other.’

903 389

Jun 8, 2021

From that point on, this new movement just grew and grew. The three of us were involved right from the start (not that we knew each other then!) in different ways. Like everyone else, we wrote personally to our MPs, explaining why we were going on strike – at least my MP was interested enough to meet up with some of us, although we decided afterwards that was only to persuade us not to join the strike!

I'm sure some of you will have some recollection of what happened on that day. There are around 3.5 million young people between the ages of 15 and 18 in the UK; depending on whose figures you believe, somewhere between 350,000 and 400,000 young people went on strike on July 16th. That's roughly 10%!

That marked the start of three months' non-stop campaigning. By the time delegates started gathering in Glasgow on November 1st, it was reckoned that more than a million young people in the UK had been involved in actions or campaigns of one kind or another, and literally tens of millions all around the world. And the message couldn't have been simpler:



**IT'S OUR FUTURE.
IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.

YOU CANNOT IGNORE US.
AND YOU CANNOT STOP US.

SO GET IT DONE!**

To be fair, world leaders really did do some good in Glasgow. Almost every country committed to deeper, faster cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. Although President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil didn't show up, every other big country agreed to a 'Net Zero economy by 2050' at the latest. Including the USA. And even Russia! The UK took everyone by surprise by going for 2045 rather than 2050, and China agreed, at the very last minute, to do everything it possibly could to get to Net Zero by 2050.

As I explained, all these new Net Zero commitments confirmed that the average temperature increase by 2100 would still be restricted to no more than 2°C - just so long as they all delivered on those commitments.

However, as Jesse keeps reminding me (and Jesse is the real climate expert amongst the three of us!), 'no more than 2°C' is very different from 'a guarantee of a stable climate'. This was borne out in the statement issued immediately after COP26 by the Union of Concerned Scientists:

'The commitments made through the Glasgow Agreement two weeks ago do not guarantee a stable climate in the second half of this century. Even if they are delivered on. Even if we succeed in restricting the average temperature increase to no more than 2°C. Leading climatologists have told world leaders, time after time, that 2°C is not a safe threshold, and that we should still be aiming to limit that temperature increase to no more than 1.5°C by the end of the century. This will require much deeper cuts in emissions of greenhouse gases over the next 20 years, delivered much faster than anything indicated in the Glasgow Agreement, whatever the implications might be for the global economy.'

I'm not sure that we really understood what that was all about at the time. Basically, we were all on a bit of a high, with a lot of celebration going on, after such an extraordinary turnaround. But things got a great deal clearer over the next 18 months – and led directly to the tragic events in September 2023.

CHAPTER 3: 2022

By Jesse Baldwin



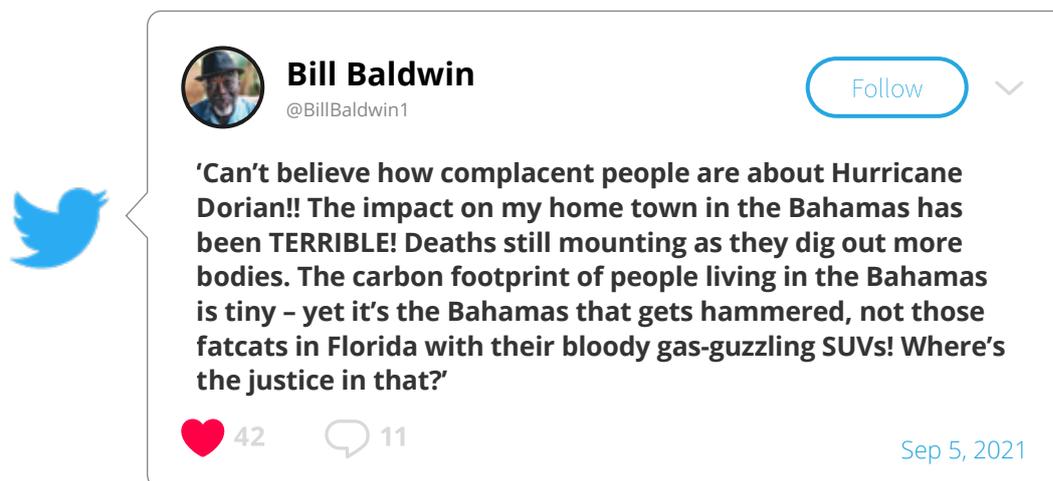
VIRUSES, JOBS, AND CLIMATE DISASTERS



CLIMATE JUSTICE

As Lahari mentioned in the last chapter, I suppose I probably do count as ‘a bit of a climate geek’! I’m interested in both the science and the politics – although I’m not as radical as Lahari and Erin in terms of direct action and support for organisations like Extinction Rebellion. I think a lot of that stuff can put people off – which I believe is exactly what we don’t need as we grapple with the Climate Emergency. We’ve just agreed to disagree on this one!

Anyway, it started for me when I was just 13, back in 2019, when my grandfather (who originally came from the Bahamas) got incredibly upset about Hurricane Dorian – apparently the strongest hurricane ever recorded as it hit land. And that land was a great big chunk of the Bahamas – exactly where he’d grown up. More than 70 people were killed, and every time I saw him, he mentioned another victim he’d known when he was a young man. He couldn’t stop thinking about a particular family he’d often stayed with, six members of which had been killed. The economy of the Bahamas was devastated – with more than \$4bn of damage. (By the way, six years on in 2025, it still hasn’t fully recovered.) He showed me a tweet of his from that time:



I guess Grandpa got a bit obsessed with Hurricane Dorian just before he died. He’d read somewhere, thinking of all the billions of tonnes of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases that had been put into the atmosphere over the last 200 years or so, that the Bahamas had contributed just 0.01% of that total volume! So whenever people talk about climate justice today, it’s sort of personal for me.

And there wasn’t enough about climate justice at COP26 – in terms of what to do about the impact of climate change on the poorest nations. But coming at a time when the global economy was still struggling after COVID-19, COP26 confirmed one thing: that climate change was never really an environmental issue at all. It was always much more about the economy than about anything else.

What the three of us see now, looking back over the last 20 years and not just over the last five, is a generation of politicians with just one BIG IDEA in their heads: that ECONOMIC GROWTH was the only way of getting things done: dealing with poverty, supporting public services, providing jobs, guaranteeing national security, and so on. The answer to all of those challenges was simple: MORE GROWTH. MORE GROWTH!

MORE GROWTH!!

It's easy to blame our politicians (I tend to do that a lot!), but every country in the world was stuck in the same rut: people were worried that without economic growth there would be no more PROGRESS. But coming to terms with the Climate Emergency meant that we had to rethink that narrative about economic growth – because more growth almost always means more greenhouse gas emissions. Which leads inevitably to more climate disruption!

In that regard, the absence at COP26 of Jair Bolsonaro, the President of Brazil, who spent a lot of his time in office laying waste to the Amazon rainforest in the name of economic growth, turned out to be a big problem.



Picture by REUTERS/Adriano Machado

President Bolsonaro: 'Anybody at home?'

One of the strongest sections of the 2021 Glasgow Agreement was all about putting an end to deforestation, once and for all, with cast-iron promises from rich countries to pay rainforest countries for keeping their forests in the ground – rather than cutting them down for agriculture or industrial development. For a lot of countries, that's what climate justice means in practice.



photo credit: UNclimatechange



Jair Bolsonaro

@Jair Bolsonaro

Follow



'Glasgow Conference full of eco-fascists and European colonialists, all trying to tell us what we should do with OUR forests! Brazil's rainforest belongs to the people of Brazil - not to the World! And we still need that land to address continuing poverty!'



31.3k



4k

Nov 5, 2021

To see the leaders of 19 countries (including all the other big rainforest countries – Indonesia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Peru and Colombia) standing under a banner saying 'Our Forests for the World's Future' was impressive – despite Bolsonaro himself tweeting away from Brasilia trying to undermine what was going on in Glasgow.

NIPAH-BX: THE NEXT VIRUS!

Nipah-BX

The Nipah virus (one of a number of henipaviruses) was first transmitted from fruit bats to humans (via pigs) in three Malaysian states in 1998. It is believed that smoke from the very severe fires going on in Indonesia at that time drove the bats out of the forest into human settlements. Since then, there have been outbreaks of Nipah virus in Bangladesh (2001 and 2011) and India (2018), with symptoms involving severe respiratory effects and inflammation of the brain. The infection rate is low, which explains why most outbreaks have been rapidly contained and why the combined number of cases remains low – at around 700. But the fatality rate is very high – between 45% and 70%.

As far back as 2005, public health specialists were getting worried about the Nipah virus evolving the ability to spread from person to person.

As it happened, Brazil's rainforests were back in the news big-time in February 2022. Nature intervened – again. Just three months after COP26, what became known as the Nipah-BX virus (see box) claimed its first victim in the Brazilian city of Manaus.

Coming hot on the heels of COVID-19 (which had hit Manaus particularly badly in both 2020 and 2021, when hospitals actually ran out of oxygen needed for COVID-19 victims), the city was traumatised. Nobody could believe that another 'zoonotic' disease (which just means something that 'spills over' from some other creature – such as a bat or a pig – to human beings, in the same way it's thought that COVID-19 had spilled over from bats to humans in the city of Wuhan in China at the end of 2019) had suddenly emerged 'out of nowhere', as it were.

Public health officials were shocked that the Brazilian variant of Nipah-BX proved to be far more contagious than outbreaks of the Nipah virus in South-East Asia. And it was still just as deadly, killing more than 60% of people infected.

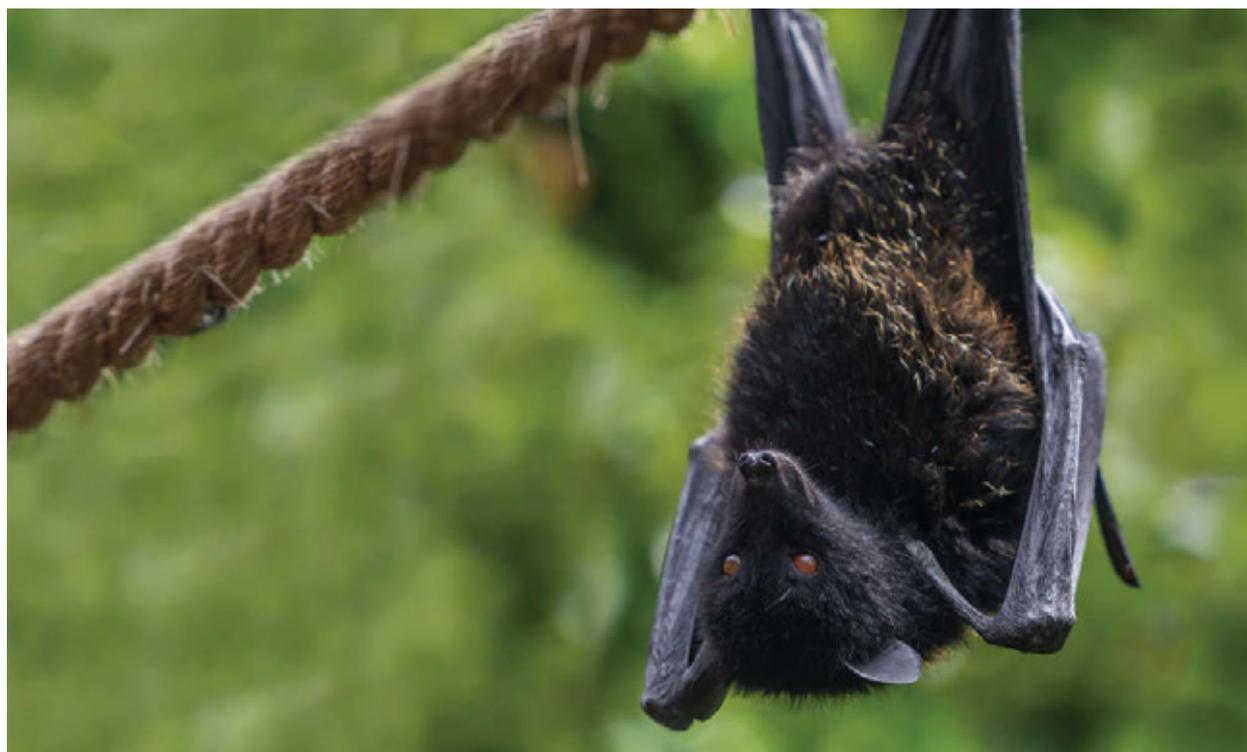
The experience of Manaus during the COVID-19 pandemic, where its citizens had to work closely together without any support from central government, made all the difference with Nipah-BX. Within 24 hours of the virus being identified, the Mayor of Manaus, Arthur Virgílio Neto, instantly locked down the entire city of two million people and the surrounding area. Precisely because the virus was both so contagious and so lethal, the lockdown had to be TOTAL, with only emergency personnel allowed on the streets. All food and essentials had to be either ordered online or delivered by volunteers.

Astonishingly, after just six weeks, Nipah-BX was under control. 1,328 people died, but – as with COVID-19 – it could have been so much worse.

Mayor Neto is quite a character. He'd fallen out big-time with President Bolsonaro during the coronavirus pandemic. He'd even appealed to Greta Thunberg to come and help him 'protect the protectors of the forests', including the many indigenous tribes in the Amazon region.

In May 2022, as soon as the Nipah-BX virus had been contained, he invited a panel of international experts (against the wishes of President Bolsonaro) to work with the Amazon region's own experts to determine the cause of the outbreak. It didn't take them long. A very similar picture emerged to what had happened in Malaysia back in 1998. As soon as Bolsonaro had become President in 2019, he'd actively encouraged a climate of violence and law-breaking across the entire Amazon region, particularly targeting protected areas set aside for indigenous people. Levels of deforestation around Manaus had soared, with a huge number of fires set deliberately to clear more land for cattle ranching.

These fires had killed and displaced countless wild animals – including thousands of fruit bats. Many had started roosting around fruit farms near Manaus, carrying a far higher viral load, having been forced out of their natural environment, than bats tested in untouched rainforest areas. There was therefore a much higher risk of transmission via pigs (it could have been rats – they're still not sure). And that's exactly what happened, with devastating consequences.



The results of the inquiry couldn't really have been clearer: Nipah-BX was a direct consequence of the intense rainforest destruction unleashed by Jair Bolsonaro and his Ministers.

When Donald Trump was still President in the US, Bolsonaro took great pleasure in being described as 'the Trump of the Tropics'! They certainly had much in common, not least in their contempt for science, on both climate issues and the pandemic. But things had started to go badly wrong for Bolsonaro by the middle of 2021 as deaths from COVID-19 soared – at 610,000, Brazil's death rate was second only to the USA by the end of that year. The anger this caused just grew and grew. To save further embarrassment, his own party kicked him out, putting forward a 'reconciliation candidate' in time for the elections in October 2022. To no avail. Former President Lula da Silva had become the opposition candidate at the end of 2021, which explains why Bolsonaro's party was unceremoniously wiped out.



I have to admit that this all seemed very far away for me and my friends at the time. Shock-horror headlines across the whole of Europe regarding the 'killer Brazilian virus' set off an instant collective panic attack, but it didn't last long. As was the case with other short-lived viruses (SARS in 2003, MERS in 2012, and Ebola in 2014), 'out of sight, out of mind' pretty much summed up our collective response once we knew that Nipah-BX was not getting out of Brazil. Which I guess was what led to David Attenborough's exasperated tweet on August 10th that year:

What's more, we really began to understand what the experts meant when they warned us in 2021:

'In a global pandemic, you are only safe if everyone is safe'.



David Attenborough

@David Attenborough

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Why do so many people still not understand what's going on? First COVID-19, then Nipah-BX. If we mess around with Nature, Nature has a way of messing around with us. Continued destruction of the rainforest and other threatened habitats is MADNESS. PURE MADNESS. It has to stop.



455



30

May 25, 2022

Most rich world countries were more or less fully vaccinated by the end of 2021. But despite the best efforts of COVAX, the global vaccine coalition, many poorer countries were still struggling to get 50% of their citizens vaccinated by the middle of 2022. Lahari talked about that feeling of overwhelming relief when the vaccines started to roll out in 2021, but that wasn't the end of it. Although levels of the virus stayed low, there were occasional outbreaks and local hotspots (often caused by people coming to the UK for business or on holiday) that would flare up, with yet more, deeply unpopular local lockdowns.

CRACKING THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS

As far as the economy was concerned, levels of unemployment remained high for the first six months of 2022 – with young people still disproportionately affected. Levels of personal debt were higher than ever before. Business confidence remained obstinately low. The general mood was very gloomy.

But looking back over the whole five years, 2022 was also the moment when things began to turn around. For instance, three separate job-generating programmes started around this time, and they've all made a huge difference to the lives of young people since then.

1. Trading Up

Sometimes things have to be very, very bad to get politicians to try something different. Back in July 2020, Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer, made a big thing of setting aside £2bn for something called the Green Homes Scheme to help homeowners make their homes more energy efficient through better insulation, double-glazing, all that kind of stuff. It was a big, one-off dollop of cash – and seen as a really important part of the Government's 'Build Back Better' campaign, with the promise of 100,000 new jobs. Within a year, it was gone!



Caroline Lucas MP

@CarolineLucas

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Chancellor confirms Green Homes scheme to be axed! Total fiasco from start to finish. Badly designed, incompetently executed. Yet another humiliating failure to sort out crisis in UK's existing housing. We urgently need complete rethink on this.



588



18

Mar 28, 2021

It's shocking to think of this now, but back in 2020 there were still something like four million people living in serious fuel poverty in the UK – needing to spend so much money on heating their cold, badly-insulated flats or houses that it affected every other aspect of their lives. This often meant they didn't have enough money for food - one of the big factors behind the four and a half million children living in poverty at that time.

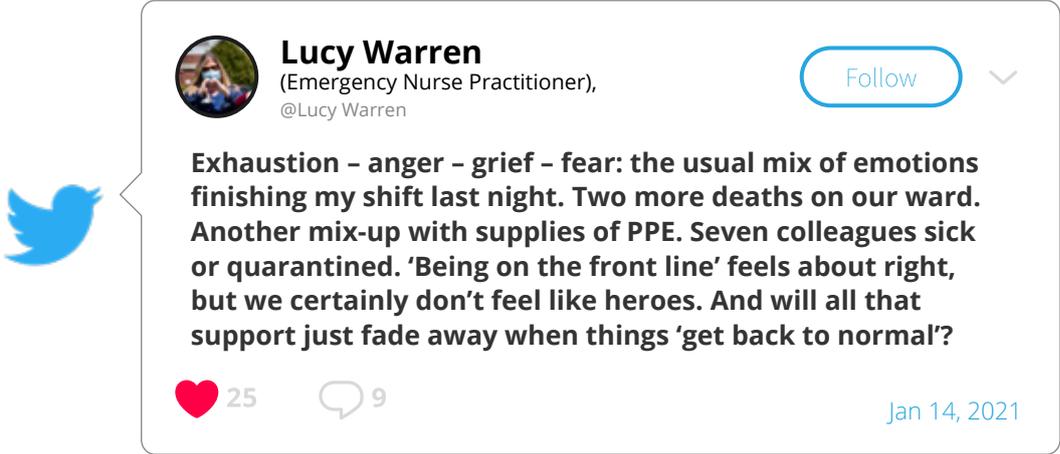
But Rishi Sunak proved himself to be one of those rare politicians who can sometimes learn from failure. Back in July 2021, he'd announced two things:

1. That from January 2022, through to the end of the decade, £6bn a year would be set aside 'to bring our housing stock in the UK up to the same levels as the best countries in the EU', and that all home improvement programmes would from now on be coordinated by city Mayors, local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.
2. As of September 2021, all Further Education colleges were encouraged to bid for money to create tens of thousands of additional places to provide training in essential skills and trades for anyone under the age of 23.

Trading Up has already proved to be a huge success: eight years of guaranteed funding, delivered at the local level, meant that local businesses could rely on work, allowing them to take on new employees. And given that the number of skilled citizens from EU countries working in the UK as electricians, joiners, fitters, plumbers, plasterers and so on, was declining, year on year, many young people saw this as a way of ensuring a secure and properly paid job.

2. Care First

Looking back on some of the coverage about the pandemic during 2020 and 2021, one thing that jumped out at me was that both nurses and care workers got massively pissed off throughout the course of the pandemic by being described as 'heroes' – or 'heroines'. Their response was very simple: 'We're not heroes. This is our job. We do it well. So the best thing you can do is to pay us properly.'



 **Lucy Warren**
(Emergency Nurse Practitioner),
@Lucy Warren [Follow](#)

Exhaustion - anger - grief - fear: the usual mix of emotions finishing my shift last night. Two more deaths on our ward. Another mix-up with supplies of PPE. Seven colleagues sick or quarantined. 'Being on the front line' feels about right, but we certainly don't feel like heroes. And will all that support just fade away when things 'get back to normal'?

 25  9 Jan 14, 2021

In fact, people's views about all public sector jobs changed a lot through 2020 and 2021 – not just nurses, but care workers, police, teachers and so on. Dad was endlessly amused at how a lot of parents became much more understanding of the role of teachers after months and months of home schooling!

And nobody any longer took the role of nurses and social care workers for granted. Their incredible sense of public service completely changed the way people thought about the meaning of 'essential workers'. It also inspired significant numbers of young people to try

and find a job in either healthcare or social services.

Back in September 2021, under ever greater pressure to do something to meet this pent-up demand from young people, the Department of Health set up 'Care First', changing the rules to make it easier for young people to become healthcare assistants and care workers. The new schemes kicked off in March 2022, and it was an immediate success. 165,000 additional young people had been recruited by the end of 2022. Many of them then went on to get 'fast-track qualifications' in nursing or social care so they could start building a long-term career.

3. Local Credit

Even though the official inquiry into the Government's mishandling of the pandemic dragged on into 2022 (and what a humiliation that was for Boris Johnson!), it had been clear from the end of 2020 onwards that there were two additional reasons why the UK had done worse than other European countries in managing the COVID-19 crisis - apart from the chronic underfunding of both the NHS and social care for more than a decade:

1. England's top-down, over-centralised, Whitehall-dominated systems;
2. Putting the private sector first (whatever the cost) in dealing with the pandemic, only involving the public sector at the local level when all else had failed.

Again, the Chancellor of the Exchequer eventually pushed through some important reforms. As unemployment stayed high throughout 2021, it was clear that Universal Credit could never be anything more than a temporary relief - and it was no good punishing people for being out of work if there was no work for them in the first place! Erin shared a tweet of hers from February 2023:



Most young people really hated being on Universal Credit. It just felt all wrong, being unemployed in their own communities, living with all the reminders of the things that needed doing in those communities. Adapting Universal Credit so as to match the local resource (ready and willing young people) with local needs (both social and environmental), has to be one of the best things that Rishi Sunak ever did, with the basic Universal Credit payment significantly 'topped up' for anyone between the ages of 18 and 25 participating in officially approved local schemes to help improve the lives of other people and the quality of the local environment.

It sounds obvious now, but it was something of a game-changer then. The money for this top-up came from central government, but Local Credit (which started out as something called 'The Right Start Fund') was managed by local authorities, working closely with local NGOs, businesses, community groups and volunteering organisations.



These three initiatives made a big impact through 2022 – and continue to do so today.

It seems to me that it's entirely reasonable to argue that none of this would have happened without the pandemic – simply because no one in Government had shown any real interest in addressing these challenges before then. But emergencies demand emergency responses. And it had been pretty much one great big rolling emergency since March 2020!

#YouWereWarned

So what of the Climate Emergency in 2022? Well, in the first half of the year, not much! It was almost as if getting the deal done in Glasgow at the end of 2021, with all those world leaders' signatures on a very long piece of paper, was all that was needed to sort out the Climate Emergency itself!

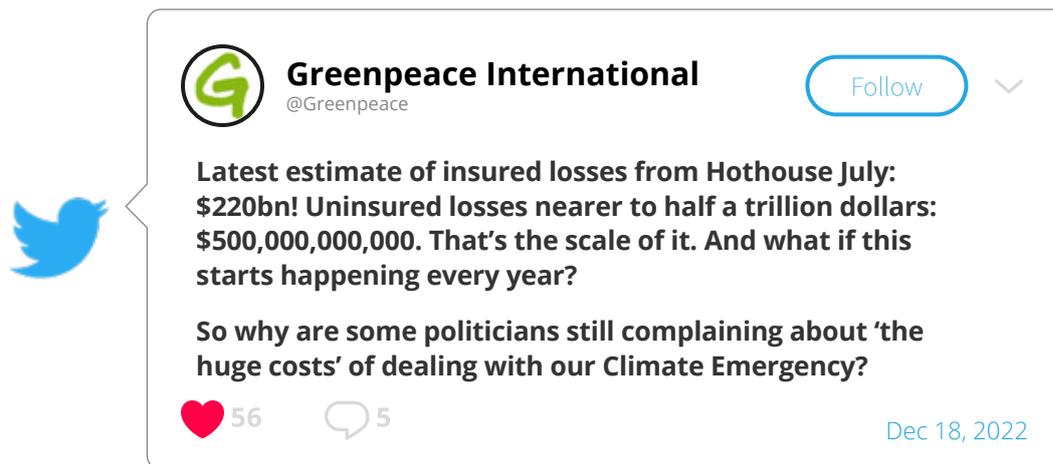
For all their fine words in Glasgow, however, governments were still completely preoccupied with fixing the economic consequences of the pandemic. Yet again, climate change was still 'something that would have to wait'.

And then came July 2022. The month that brought the multi-billion-dollar global reinsurance industry to the edge of bankruptcy, which would almost certainly have led to a massive economic collapse. (Reinsurers act as 'the insurers of last resort' for every insurance company operating anywhere in the world.) This was the statement put out jointly by Munich Re and Swiss Re, the two largest reinsurance companies in the world, in October 2022:

'Preliminary estimates indicate losses of around \$175 billion arising out of the spate of climate-induced disasters back in July. This has caused significant disruption across the global insurance industry, with many companies, both large and small, already bankrupt or in serious financial difficulties. By our estimates, more than 500,000 people have already lost their jobs in the industry.'

Devastating though that is, we are even more concerned that there are now millions of businesses and literally countless individuals operating without any insurance cover whatsoever. Leaders in the industry from both Europe and the USA, together with the Directors of both the World Bank and the IMF, have been summoned to an emergency meeting in January to review further underwriting strategy and capital requirements.'

(Unbelievably, it was actually much worse than that. Subsequent analysis saw that figure for insured losses rise to \$220 billion, with uninsured losses (affecting people and businesses who couldn't afford insurance in the first place) estimated to be more than twice that figure.)

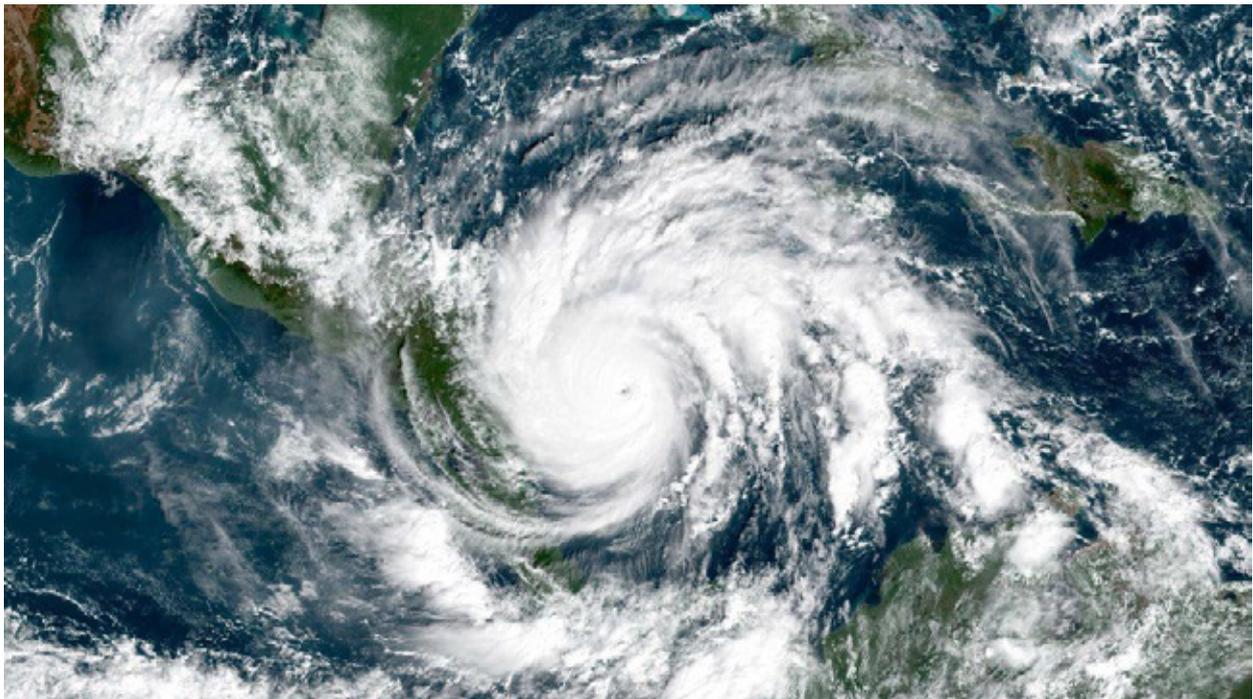


So what had caused this meltdown in the insurance industry? In that one month of July 2022, there were six major 'catastrophes':

- The wildfires in California and Oregon that raged for the whole of the month, and well into August, leading to the loss of 330 lives, destroying nearly twice as much forested land as the previous worst fires in 2020.
- Devastating flooding in Bangladesh, affecting more than 40 million people, after very heavy monsoon rains and a storm surge in the Bay of Bengal on 24th July.
- Extreme drought in northern China, following months of incredibly high temperatures, causing more than 175,000 farmers to desert their land and what was left of their livestock, causing extreme financial hardship and serious food shortages.
- The worst flooding ever seen in the UK, northern France, Germany and the Netherlands, after a five-week unbroken heatwave culminated in a week of unprecedented thunderstorms at the end of July. (The entire annual rainfall of the Netherlands fell in two days, demolishing flood defences that had been designed to cope with rising sea levels, not internal flooding.)
- Major wildfires in the both the Russian and Canadian Arctic, as bad as anything witnessed in 2019 and 2020.
- Hurricane Scylla in Florida in the final week of July.

This, of course, was the real shocker. Florida had already been affected by more hurricanes than any other US state, and people were endlessly speculating about when 'the big one' would be coming. There had already been two hugely damaging hurricanes back in 2017 and 2018, but this was far and away the worst ever, causing such devastation in and around Miami that nearly 20% of the city was entirely lost, and the rest has still not fully recovered three years on. Were it not for an extraordinary evacuation effort that took place as Hurricane

Scylla changed course at the very last moment, the death toll would have been far, far worse than the 2,977 recorded victims.



Picture: NASA

Hurricane Scylla, 28/07/2022

This coincidence was almost unbearable for US citizens. The fact that precisely the same number of Americans had died through Hurricane Scylla as died in the attack by Islamic fundamentalists on the Twin Towers in New York in September 2001, unleashed an intensity of debate about climate change that had never been seen before. Even the most extreme conspiracy theorists could not blame Hurricane Scylla on Barack Obama, Jews, Blacks, Bill Gates, Muslims, pinkos or President Xi Jinping. A sort-of fuzzy reality started to dawn on parts of the US that had previously been beyond the reach of otherwise unarguable science.

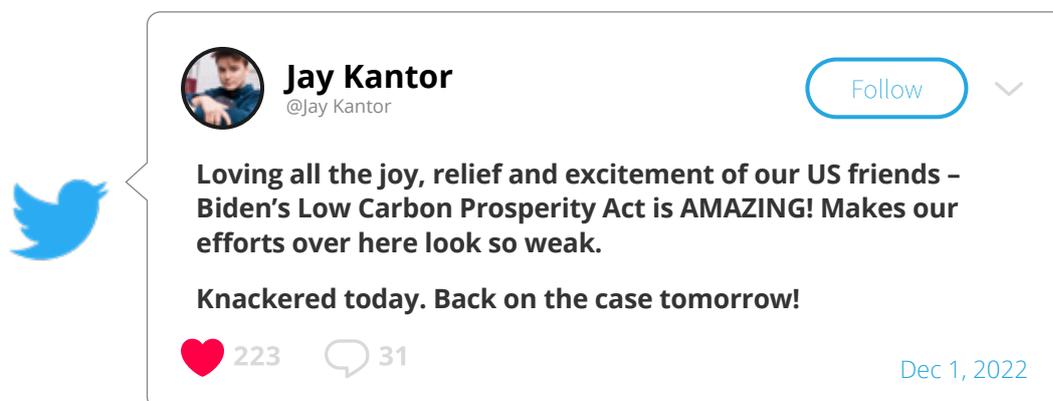
To have both California and Florida simultaneously devastated by extreme weather events, which climate scientists asserted were '100% attributable' to a rapidly warming planet, turned out in retrospect to be exactly the shock to the system that so many US citizens still needed at that time.

President Biden seized this opportunity. Since his election in November 2020, he and Vice-President Kamala Harris had run up against endless barriers in Congress – even in 2022, there were still a lot of Republicans who just wanted to slow everything down. Denialists turned inactivists! With the mid-term elections coming up in November, the Democrats pushed a new 'Low-Carbon Prosperity Act' through both Houses.

The key to this was the decision to impose a charge on all fossil fuels (starting at \$40 a tonne of CO₂), the revenue from which gets refunded to all US citizens on a strict per capita basis, ensuring that the least well-off benefit the most. That was the really smart thing about this measure – the annual 'dividend' wasn't huge (roughly \$750 for everyone over the age of 16), but it was seen to make good on the Democrats' commitment to Climate Justice in practice.

President Biden also made good on his promise that no taxpayer's money would be used to

subsidise any fossil fuel enterprise from that point on. At that time, direct subsidies to coal, oil and gas companies in the US still amounted to more than \$20 billion a year, and indirect subsidies (in terms of those companies not being required to pay for all the damage done through them to people and planet by the greenhouse gases they emitted) to many, many times that amount.



For the millions of young climate campaigners in the USA, this was a moment to cherish. Years of being told they didn't understand the science, of being dismissed out of hand by the Republicans, being ignored by the media, and being patronised by the Democrats (whose historical record on climate change, including Barack Obama's eight years in the White House, had indeed been dreadful), could now be seen in a very different light.

The four of us were talking about this the other day, comparing the situation in the US with what's been happening here in the UK. In both countries there's been a heavy price to pay for this – in terms of the emotional burden that young climate campaigners have had to carry for more than a decade. It's been really hard.

But nothing in comparison to what was to follow in 2023.

AMERICA'S PEAK MEAT MOMENT

Before we get onto that, here's my last takeaway from having spent so much time looking at the US scene in 2022. After a decade where per capita meat consumption in the USA had stayed more or less the same, 2022 was the year when it really started to go down. In other words, the so-called 'Peak Meat Moment' had well and truly arrived in the USA.

(What people mean by that 'Peak Meat Moment' was that annual meat consumption in the USA would never again exceed 2021 levels – it's continued to decline every year since then. That's not the case for the whole of humankind, but even in China and South-East Asia, per capita meat consumption has been growing much more slowly over the last few years. That's what happens: things first grow more slowly, and then level off, before they start to decline! There's now a huge vegan movement amongst young people in China.)

There wasn't any one single reason for this. But growing awareness of the climate crisis, and a big push on the importance of public and personal health after the coronavirus pandemic, seemed to spill over into the way people felt about what they were eating – particularly young people. Amongst 18- to 25-year-olds in the USA, meat consumption fell by 8% in 2022 – four times as high as the average for the country as a whole!



Ariana Grande

@Ariana Grande

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So that's it, you carnivores! The Peak Meat Moment! So I'm celebrating today - for people, planet and for all farm animals. And to all those who've been thinking about eating less meat for some time, or even NO MEAT AT ALL, I just want to say this has to be YOUR MOMENT! EVERY BITE COUNTS - GO VEGAN NOW!



109.8k



12.1k

Apr 6, 2022

What was happening was that big livestock companies were starting to be seen as just as much of a problem as big oil companies. Their names (Tyson, JBS, Cargill, Smithfield and so on), were nothing like as well known as the big oil companies, as they'd been so successful in hiding behind all their different brand names on the packaging. A lot of consumers were still being taken in by claims about environmental responsibility or 'high animal welfare'. It was becoming clear, however, that Big Meat's hold on people's 'way of life' was as big a problem as that of Big Oil - and, before that, Big Tobacco.

But the tide was turning. The science behind all the controversy just kept on getting stronger and stronger:



Doctors and nutritionists had convincingly demonstrated that a high percentage of animal-based protein in one's diet was bad for people's health, particularly in terms of an increased risk of heart disease.



Agricultural experts had convincingly demonstrated that eating meat is a very inefficient way of getting the protein we need. The global livestock industry takes up a vast amount of farmland to grow crops to feed the animals - land which should be growing crops or fresh produce for direct human consumption.



Climate scientists had convincingly demonstrated that intensive livestock production was a major contributor to climate change, responsible for at least 15% of all emissions of greenhouse gases - including all the deforestation still going on to grow more of the required feed crops, particularly soybeans. (The industry also does a huge amount of damage to the environment, through soil degradation, impact on biodiversity and water pollution.)



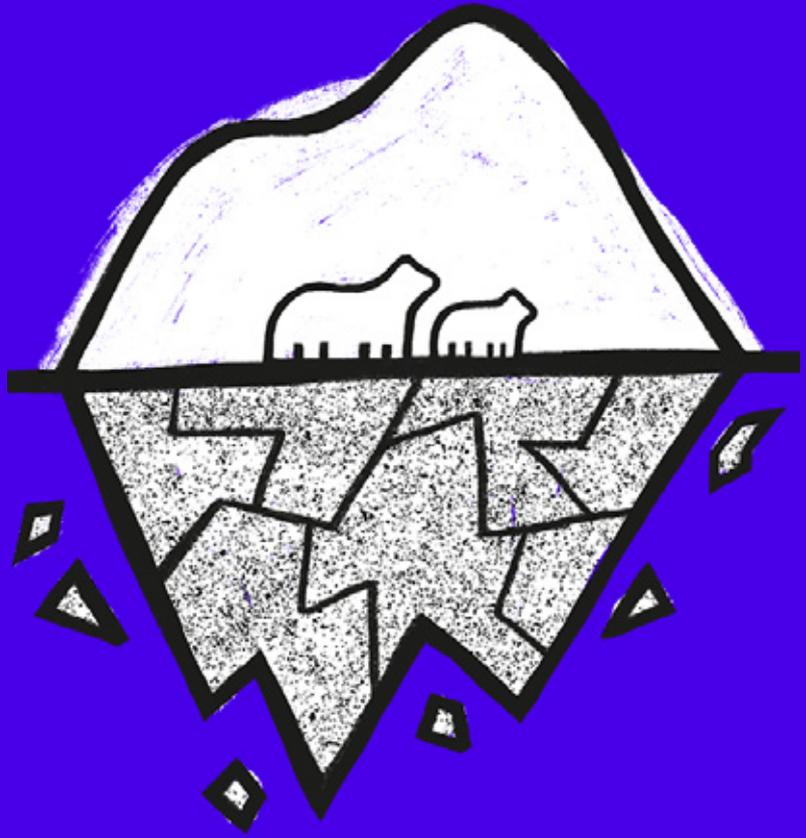
And animal welfare campaigners had eloquently made the case that rearing animals in factory conditions caused untold cruelty to billions of animals - in fact, to 72 billion animals in 2022!

The idea of getting more of the protein we need from plants rather than animals just grew and grew. There were more high quality and affordable plant-based products on the market every year. (I can remember that I was almost addicted to Vuna in 2022 - a tuna look-alike made with pea protein, which became an instant hit with vegetarians and vegans.)

Coming hot on the heels of the plant-based revolution, we saw the same thing happening

with artificial meat – or ‘clean meat’, as it’s often called. Taking cells from animals and growing them on in bioreactors. To start with, lots of people thought this was really ‘icky’! But it’s very different now. For people who like the ‘feel’ and ‘taste’ of so-called ‘real meat’ (and are therefore unlikely to become vegetarians or vegans), but hate the damage done to people, planet and animals from intensive factory farming, it works. Especially as it’s now completely impossible to tell the difference between them!

CHAPTER 4: 2023
By Erin Wilson



**SEA ICE MELTS DOWN,
YOUNG PEOPLE RISE UP**



#NoGoingBack

So here we are. Nearing the halfway point in our take on these five 'impossible' years, as President Kamala Harris described them just a few weeks ago.

It's ironic that I've been allocated 2023 as my chapter. It's mostly because of my involvement in #RiseUp in September that year – more to follow in a moment. But it was also a real 'turnaround year' for me personally. In January and February, I was either unemployed or homeless for a few weeks - living in London.

I know that sounds a bit lame, but as you were reading through those chapters from Jesse and Lahari, I hope you got a sense of more and more people just waking up to things. As if COVID-19 had stripped away some of the false certainties people had once believed in. Stopped us thinking it was all OK, even if things were a bit rubbish, not just during COVID but before COVID. It just felt different, though I'm finding it hard to put my finger on exactly why.

I'd never heard that word 'spillover' before Jesse explained it – as in diseases passing from one species to another (COVID-19, Nipah-BX and so on). But there's also been a lot of 'spillover' in terms of increased awareness. Insights shared amongst experts and campaigners spilled over into the general public in ways that hadn't really happened before. Not necessarily the detailed science, for sure. But enough of a 'feel' for something to change people's take on it. And one spillover often leads to another.

Take me, for instance: once I got the idea that greenhouse gases were screwing up the climate, cutting down on the amount of meat I ate was just obvious. Before that, I guess I would have thought about climate change in one box, and food and farming in a different box.

Lahari suggested that I should look at two other big ideas that were gaining ground from 2020 onwards: something called 'regenerative agriculture' (bit of a mouthful!) and agroecology – or farming ecologically – which I'd never heard of before. But by 2023, countries all over the world were pioneering all sorts of different ways of farming in response to the threat of climate change. Instead of hammering the land by trying to produce as much as possible, year after year, farmers were putting soil protection at the top of their priority list.

There's a lot of CO₂ in the world's soils. It was a shock for me to discover that at least half of it had been lost over the last 70 years, through constant ploughing and poor farming practices. But farmers are now being rewarded for increasing the amount of CO₂ they can retain in their soils.

And for protecting biodiversity on their farms. And for managing water much more carefully. And for minimising the use of both fertilisers and pesticides. That's what farming ecologically means. Pretty much the exact opposite of the kind of large-scale, chemical-intensive farming that dominated the world for the last 60 years. Isn't that amazing?!

It was also recognised at the time that farmers had a huge contribution to make by planting more trees on their land, including fruit and nut trees – known as agroforestry. Trees also absorb lots of CO₂. So the more trees we have, the less CO₂ in the atmosphere.



Picture: Richard Straight, USDA FS, National Agroforestry Center



Helen Browning

Chief Executive, Soil Association
@Helen Browning

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Some really good news from Defra: back in 2018, just 3% of farmland in the UK were using any kind of agroforestry techniques. Five years on, that has more than doubled (now 6.5%), and will apparently be up to 10% in a couple of years! The amount of subsidy that the Government has provided has in reality been very low - but the benefits are huge!



Feb 24, 2023

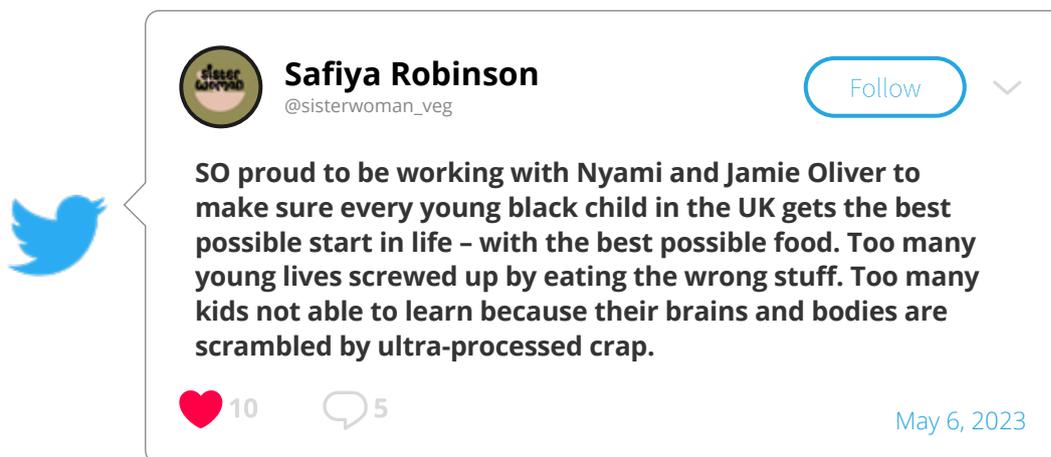
Back in 2020, 50% of the UK's cropland was used to produce feed crops for animals, mainly for pork, poultry and dairy. At the same time we only managed to grow 50% of the vegetables and less than 20% of the fruit we consumed. COVID-19 reminded us all just how vulnerable our food supply chains were. And just how unhealthy our diets were. And, as Lahari explained back in Chapter 2, much healthier diets.

The shameful reality back then was that the UK consumed more unhealthy, ultra-processed food (that's a technical term, if you want to look it up!), jam-packed full of fatty, salty, sugary poison, than any other country in Europe - making up a massive 51% of family food purchases. (By way of contrast, in Italy it was just 13%. France 14%.)

And that was where the new Obesity Strategy really kicked in. Ministers simply had to find

ways of reducing that ridiculously high dependence on highly processed foods. Especially as far as children were concerned. It was well known at that time that more than 90% of children in the UK were failing to eat their five portions a day of fruit and vegetables. And the poorer a family was, the greater its dependence on cheap, ultra-processed food. BAME families were particularly badly affected.

2023 saw an explosion of interest in doing things differently – for instance, Lahari got herself involved in the amazing Nyami (a collective of black women chefs) as they joined forces with the veteran food campaigner Jamie Oliver to work with local authorities and schools across the country.



These days, we're much less tolerant about the government of the day stitching up cosy deals with big food companies. #NoGoingBack touched so many parts of our lives – and those two decades before 2020 now look more and more like an actual conspiracy to poison young children. To get them addicted as early as possible to that dreaded trio of fat, sugar and salt.

That was good for economic growth, of course. And for the food processors and big agriculture companies, of course. But it was a nightmare for everybody else – particularly for taxpayers picking up the tab, year after year, for this assault on the health of the nation. Tens of billions of pounds every year treating people who should never have got sick in the first place! (Lahari's a bit cross with me for including the paragraph above – 'sounds paranoid', is what she said! But how else can we explain these things?)

Anyway, that's now pretty much on the way out. And as you know, schools have played a big part in that, once they bounced back from all the disruption caused by the pandemic – there's a real focus now on healthy food and nutrition.

TROUBLED MINDS

For all three of us, and almost all our friends, COVID-19 completely messed up our time at school. From March 2020 through to the end of 2021, nothing was normal. It wasn't just lost time being out of school. It was lost time together. Lost opportunities and experiences of every kind. For instance, I've always loved Indie music, but I didn't get to a single live concert for more than two years.

Both Jesse and Lahari have already touched on this, but there really was a sense of 'one bloody thing on top of another'!

A lot of us were also involved in campaigns about social justice and racial inequality. It wasn't that the Climate Emergency had gone away. Far from it. But it was still just one more crisis amongst many. And it was still not being treated as a full-on, 'your house is on fire' Emergency.

As someone who started campaigning on climate change when I was fourteen, all this really got to me. Coming on top of the death of my grandmother in 2020. And moving to a new town – without any friends. I was definitely one of the 750,000 kids said to have been 'profoundly affected' by COVID-19 – according to the Department of Health's 2022 statistics on post-COVID mental health issues.

I'm not proud of it now, but I just got more and more angry. Blaming my mother for moving here in the first place. Blaming my teachers. Blaming the politicians. I kept on getting suspended from school, and completely screwed up my GCSEs. So I just took off. Lived for a bit with my grandfather, who'd moved from Grimsby to Norfolk after the death of his wife. Soon got angry with him, so took off again, to London. Homeless for a bit. As I said, it was messy.

Weirdly, I owe my recovery to the Government! Back in 2021, alongside all those other things Jesse mentioned in Chapter 3, Ministers also got their act together by setting up the National Nature Service, promising £500 million to get it going in 2022, and £250 million a year for the next four years. £1.5 billion in all.



The idea was to create 150,000 jobs for young people working with environment and conservation NGOs to create new parks and urban green spaces, to restore degraded wildlife areas, to help plant trees (the Government had committed to plant 30,000 hectares a year, a target it had completely failed to deliver on before then), and to work on flood protection schemes.



Mark Rylance

@MarkRylanceInfo

Follow



First anniversary of the National Nature Service - and what a brilliant initiative this is! 26,373 new jobs created in the first year! Which translates into the lives of so many young people transformed.

And even more amazing that this should coincide with the first anniversary of Biden's Civilian Climate Corps - which is also doing equally incredible things in the USA. Plenty to celebrate!



103



3

Sep 10, 2023

The National Nature Service wasn't just about the environment. It was about improving people's health and wellbeing. Addressing people's mental health needs by providing access to nature and green spaces for more people. Especially in disadvantaged communities. Especially for young people.

One of the NGOs that helped set up the National Nature Service was The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), working alongside the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB and Groundwork.



Completely by chance, I met up with someone involved in two big TCV projects in Epping Forest. I went along to see what it was all about. Stuck around - and stayed for the next six months! Being there close to nature, working with a great bunch of young people, many of whom had experienced COVID-19 in the same way as I had, made it possible to make sense of things again. I felt connected. Grounded. Inspired. And I'm still a TCV volunteer here in town - providing my very own nature-based solution.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

That's something we hear a lot about these days - solutions to climate change by doing stuff to heal Nature, to put right all the damage done to the natural environment over the last 30 or 40 years.

And not before time - with animal populations down by two-thirds since 1970. With more than a million species worldwide at risk of extinction, including two in every five species of plants. And a third of all insects endangered - including many key pollinating insects on which so much of agriculture depends.

All this time our politicians knew what they should be doing to protect the natural world, but ended up doing nothing - literally nothing - that might get in the way of more economic growth. Growth first - nature nowhere. Same story with the climate:

Growth today - climate tomorrow. Same story with plastic pollution: Growth first – forget the oceans. In fact, that’s always been the story.

Certainly here in the UK. Despite endless promises from politicians, more and more important habitats have been lost, with more and more species put at risk. Every year, the NGOs publish a State of Nature Report, detailing the extent of the damage done. The 2022 Report was a bit more upbeat. But not much. Money still talks. Nature still suffers in silence.

But with economies still reeling from the effects of the pandemic, the true value of nature was suddenly a lot clearer. This was the much-tweeted cover of the 2022 State of Nature Report:



Jesse has a really cool way of thinking about this: as well as doing everything we can to reduce emissions of CO₂ from our economies (referred to as ‘decarbonisation’), we also have to get as much CO₂ as possible back into natural systems – into forests, wetlands, soils and so on. In other words, recarbonisation. I just love that decarbonisation/recarbonisation story! Sort out the Climate Emergency by healing all the damage we’ve done to Nature.

As it happens, 2023 was a great year for Nature-Based Solutions. In February, the Prime Ministers of the UK and Indonesia announced two massive projects to protect and restore peat bogs in their respective countries. Peat bogs store vast amounts of CO₂. When they’re destroyed, all that CO₂ is released into the atmosphere.

Here’s a shock-horror statistic for you: **6% of total global emissions in 2022 came from draining and developing peatland.** That’s twice as much as the emissions from aviation! Both the UK and Indonesia have huge amounts of peatlands left, and these two restoration schemes (basically ‘re-wetting’ dried-out areas) ensured that tens of millions of tonnes of CO₂ would be permanently retained.

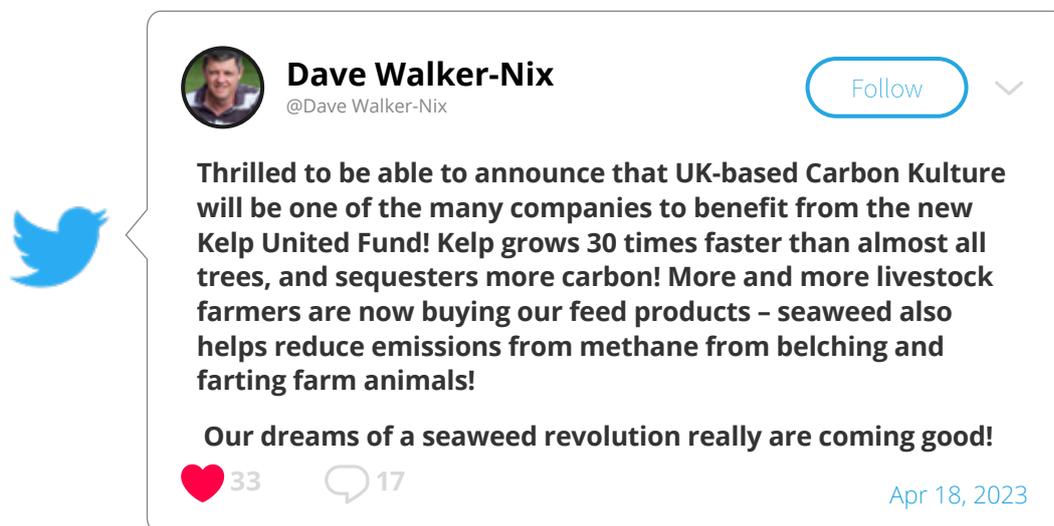
Just a few weeks after that, the World Bank announced funding for the largest ever programme of mangrove restoration projects, amounting to \$5bn over the rest of the decade, with 20% of the funding coming from the USA and 20% from China. Mangroves also store huge amounts of CO₂. As well as protecting coastal areas from storms and rising sea levels. And providing perfect ‘nurseries’ for young fish.

And then, in April, a consortium of five huge private equity funds announced the launch of Kelp United, a multibillion-dollar investment fund to accelerate the production of different kinds of seaweed (or kelp) outside of Asia – where it was already a huge business. Sounds a

bit weird, but seaweed is turning into a bit of a miracle product:

1. It absorbs a lot of CO₂.
2. It helps restore marine environments.
3. It's a very healthy product.

Triple whammy – as they used to say!

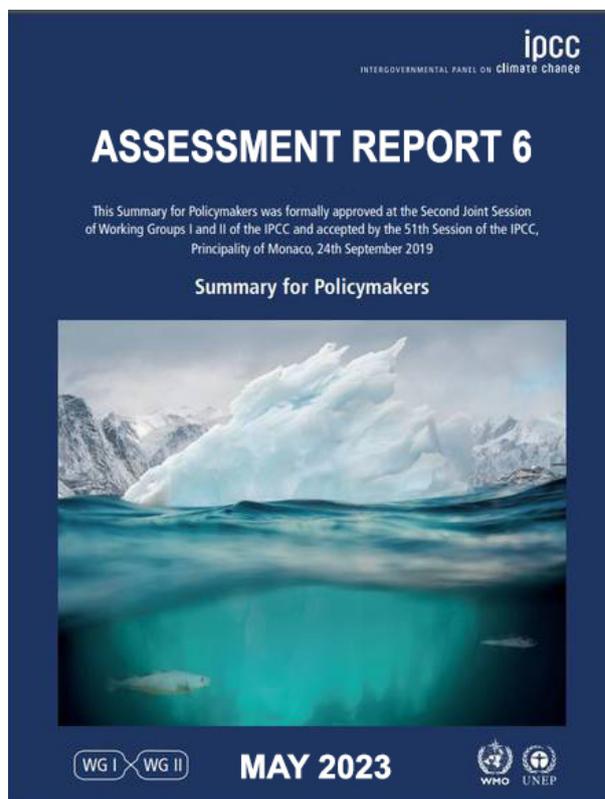


Sadly, none of this got very much coverage at the time. From May onwards, any good news about the climate was overwhelmed by the publication of AR6.

ASSESSMENT REPORT 6 (AR6)

It's weird that almost everybody reading this today (in 2025) will know exactly what AR6 stands for. Back in May 2023, almost nobody had a clue what AR6 stood for – and almost certainly wouldn't have cared anyway. But it's AR6 that led directly to Rise Up later in the year, and therefore to everything that has happened since then. So I just need to unpack this a bit for you, even if it is covering old ground.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was set up way back in 1988 to provide governments with the scientific advice they need to inform climate policies. It does this by constantly analysing all the peer-reviewed work from thousands of scientists around the world, bringing that together in a series of major Assessment Reports – or ARs. Before 2023, there had been five Assessment Reports since 1988, with the last one back in 2014 – almost ten years earlier.



Since then, the IPCC had also published three Special Reports, including a really crucial Report in 2018 on what the difference would be, by the end of the century, between an average temperature increase of 2°C and an average temperature increase of 1.5°C. Doesn't sound like much of a difference – just 0.5°C – but it's crucial in terms of ensuring a stable climate. This had a big impact on people at the time, and was one of the most important influences in the emergence of Extinction Rebellion and the School Strikes movement through 2019.

So the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) was going to be a big deal, come what may. And the fact that it was more than a year late (not just because of COVID-19, but on account of all the political controversy going on behind the scenes) made it an even bigger deal.

Here's the specific paragraph that caused such controversy – even though it's written in the cautious, geeky style that all IPCC Reports rely on:

'As laid out in our Special Report on the Oceans in 2019, we said that 'the likely range' of sea level rise by the end of the century would be between 43 centimetres and 84 centimetres. But we acknowledged that a 1.1 metres rise was the 'upper likely range', and that a rise of up to 2 metres 'could not be ruled out'. Four years on, we now have 'high confidence' that the sea level will rise by no less than 1 metre by 2100, and 'medium confidence' that it will be in a range of 1.3 metres and 1.4 metres.'

It didn't take long for the significance of those few words (representing the insights of literally hundreds of peer-reviewed scientific papers, going back over more than six years) to be picked up by mainstream commentators. And then by every single young climate activist around the world.



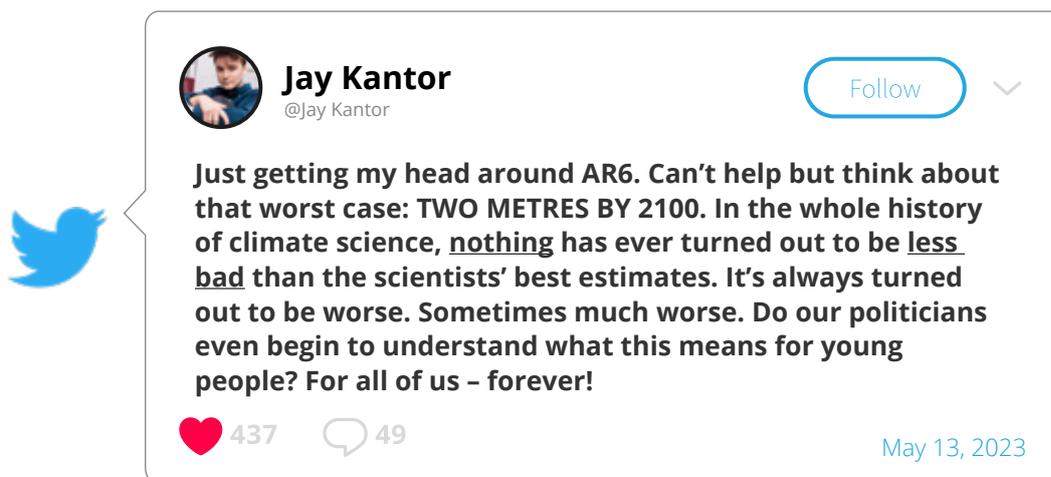
A MINIMUM OF A ONE METRE SEA LEVEL RISE BY THE END OF THE CENTURY.

That was the best we could hope for. And it could be a lot worse.

What people soon realised is that this figure is both a minimum (ie, no less than one metre) and an average: some parts of the world will experience more, some less. Some countries and many cities will disappear completely – and not just the Small Island States that had been desperately trying to bring this reality to the attention of world leaders for years and years. Which will mean tens of millions of people losing their homes. Becoming climate refugees.

What's more, AR6 went on to explore the possibility of a 1.5 metre sea level rise by 2100, and even of a 'WORST CASE' of two metres.

I was 17 when that bombshell landed in my life. The same as the rest of us. We've talked a lot about this moment, although we didn't know each other then. But apparently we all started doing exactly the same kind of calculation: we'll be 95 in 2100, all else being equal. Our children (if we have any) will be in their 60s, or thereabouts. Our grandchildren (if our children have children) will be in their 30s, or thereabouts. So the lives of all of our children, and the lives of all of their children, will be devastated by that one consequence of climate change. By that one-metre sea level rise. Without even thinking about all the other impacts of climate change.



Lahari was out in Mumbai when AR6 was published. It caused an enormous fuss. Mumbai was already experiencing more and more extreme weather. Very heavy monsoon rains, leading to serious flooding in 2015, 2019 and 2022. In 2020, Cyclone Nisarga had just missed Mumbai – with historians quick to remind politicians that what was a much smaller city back in the 19th Century (Mumbai now has a population of around 20 million!) was completely devastated by cyclones. A combination of rising sea levels and a Category 4 or 5 cyclone, with wind speeds of more than 200kph, would cause massive loss of life.

You know what's really shocking? There was actually nothing new in AR6. Many individual scientists had been exploring scenarios of this kind for a long time – and AR6 referenced all of that work. I guess that's what was different: this was the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Set up by governments to advise governments, on the basis of the best possible science available to them at the time. Not to be ignored, therefore.

Within days, the implications of AR6 had been spelled out, often pretty sensationally, across the global media, in language that couldn't be ignored: were we to carry on as we were doing then, with emissions of greenhouse gases staying more or less the same, or only very slowly declining, things would go on getting worse and worse. Life as we knew it would be finished. Rich world, poor world, north or south, east or west, it would be over. And the level of human suffering involved in this would be beyond words. With those tens of millions of people joining an already huge number of climate refugees.

I can't help getting enraged in writing these words, knowing how many scientists, authors and campaigners have written more or less the same words over more or less the last 30 years. But too many people just didn't want to listen during that time. Too many politicians didn't want any 'inconvenient truths' getting in the way of their dreams of limitless economic growth - as we keep on pointing out.

#RISEUP

And then, in August, came what was described by many as the final 'final warning'. It happened in the Arctic. Every year, the sea ice in the Arctic recedes in the summer (between March and September), and then builds back up again in the winter. That sea ice is critical, as it keeps all those northern polar regions cool. But for many years, the summer melting has been getting worse. In 2020, the average area of sea ice in September was measured at 3.92 million km². In 2022, scientists were deeply perturbed to see the September average fall to its lowest level ever (at 3.18 million km²). And utterly shocked when it fell below 2.5 million km² for the first time ever in 2023.

'Death spiral in the Arctic' was the go-to headline all around the world.





Professor Peter Wadhams

Cambridge University
@Professor Peter Wadhams

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This pretty much confirms what some of us have been saying for a long time: that all summer sea ice will be gone by 2050 at the very latest, and more likely as early as 2040. This will have devastating consequences for the global climate – in so many different ways. There is now literally NO EXCUSE for politicians not moving a lot further, a lot faster.



27



11

Aug 10, 2023



Picture: Reuters

Coming on top of AR6, it was hard to know how to cope with this. We kept thinking back to 2019, when at least seven million young people had participated in school strikes or other climate actions in one part of the world or another by the end of the year. Or reflecting on the fact that 2020 had turned out so differently as a consequence of COVID-19. Or 2021, which had also been tough, despite the successful protests leading up to COP26 at the end of the year. But everything moved very fast after the sea ice saga, as we all know.

But everything moved very fast after the sea ice saga, as we all know. So much has already been written about those four momentous weeks that followed in September and October that I need only provide a brief summary here.

At the start of September, an initiative called #RestofOurLives got things moving – with hundreds of young climate leaders announcing a series of actions in cities all around the world. With brilliant support from NGOs and civil society organisations of every kind, from businesses and trade unions, from faith leaders and so on. (I dug out this tweet of mine at that time – sounds horribly naïve now, but that’s how we all felt!)



Erin Wilson

@Erin Wilson

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Very excited at #RestOfOurLives! Lucky enough to be one of 350 organisers of the September 17th protests here in the UK. Took me right back to the Schools Strikes in 2019 - we even had a totally inspiring message from Greta Thunberg! Same spirit, same anger, same support for each other.



478



59

Sep 6, 2023

On Sunday 17th September, more than four million schoolchildren were involved in protests of one kind or another. Completely peaceful protests, no confrontation - just a heartfelt plea to politicians the world over to get their act together.

The specific events that led up to the killing of three 16-year-old protestors in Moscow on that day are still shrouded in uncertainty, with President Putin still denying that any official security personnel could possibly have been involved. Even now, he still blames it on the actions of 'maverick extremists', though no arrests have ever been made.

The shock this caused rippled around the world. The protests in many countries were extended indefinitely, in solidarity with those who had been killed. Their names (Maksim Glukhov, Sofia Igoshin and Misha Kasyanenko) were suddenly everywhere, emblazoned on everything. At some point, #RestofOurLives morphed into Rise Up. And this grew into a great roar of protest from young people around the world.

The number of protestors kept on growing, with little if any central coordination. Schoolchildren were often taking the lead, but were joined by more and more university students, and then by young people from every walk of life. 'If not now, when? If not us, who?' - a cliché repeated almost endlessly during that time. More and more countries got involved, including countries which had no previous record of climate activism.

Protests turned into full-blown occupations - of government buildings, city centres, the offices of Big Oil companies, even of power stations. In many countries, the police could hardly cope. Their tactics became less constrained, with injuries to protesters mounting every day.

September 23rd saw five more deaths when a peaceful protest in Jakarta turned into a full-on pitched battle with the police. In many US cities, campaigners for social justice and racial equality joined forces with young climate justice campaigners. Confrontations escalated. By the end of the month, four young American climate activists had been killed.

Chinese authorities, witnessing millions of young Chinese out in the streets, and fearing that this could grow into something much, much worse than the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, deployed armed troops in more than 25 Chinese cities. No-one can be absolutely sure how many died, but Amnesty International's subsequent report said at least 20.

And then it all changed. Something quite extraordinary happened. Millions of grandparents had become so concerned by the way in which their grandchildren were being threatened, and beaten up, or even killed, that they started to turn out in huge numbers to provide

'protective cover'. They just wanted to be there for us. In huge numbers. Day after day. The image of David Attenborough, then aged 98, being led away by police from a demonstration in central London, became an overnight global sensation.

The protests all across the UK were unbelievable. I was involved from start to finish. Joining the first march in central London on September 17th, and staying there until October 1st. I got arrested three times, once for being part of a group of more than 500 that successfully took over Shell's HQ building on the Embankment for two whole days, before being evicted in an extremely violent way. Fortunately, the police just didn't have time to process everyone, as there were so many people being arrested in the last couple of weeks, with all the prison cells in police stations in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Cardiff unable to hold any more people.

The deadlock was only broken, on October 1st, when the 15 Members of the UN Security Council agreed to hold an Emergency Session before the end of the month, guaranteeing urgent measures to address the worsening Climate Emergency. Everyone – governments, protestors, police – were desperate by then to defuse a worsening situation. There was a massive feeling of relief when Rise Up movements all around the world agreed to postpone further demonstrations until that Emergency Session.

In the end, at least 46 young people had been killed. The shock of this, exploding in all of our lives, almost out of nowhere, was traumatic.

But it changed everything.

CHAPTER 5: 2024
By Lahari Parekh



**COMMUNITY POWER,
GREEN TECHNOLOGY,
AND THE MIRACLE OF
DETROIT**



KEEPING IT LOCAL

Nothing was ever quite the same again. Power had shifted between the generations. Young people had stepped up, and had no intention of stepping back down again.

Back in Chapter 2, I mentioned what became known as ‘the War of the Ages’, with an endless series of disputes between young and old. But Rise Up changed all that. In all sorts of different ways, adults (and particularly grandparents) were coming to terms with the damage they’d done, collectively, to the life prospects of young people and all future generations. That well-known saying of John Rawls

‘Do for future generations what you would have had past generations do for you’

took on new meaning. A whole generation looked at itself in the mirror and didn’t much like what it saw.

Many of those grandparents who got involved in the Rise Up protests in the UK also got involved in the Good Ancestor Project (GAP), with the aim ‘of supporting young people as they seek to put right some of the legacy issues we’ve inflicted on them – particularly today’s Climate and Ecological Emergencies’. Within a year, GAP in the UK had more than a million members!



Lahari Parekh

@lahari_parekh

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Rise Up reminder! It’s nearly 6 months on from the first day of Rise Up last year! With a lot of work still to be done.

Join me on Saturday to launch our local Good Ancestor Project: 12pm outside the Town Hall. ‘Do for future generations what you would have past generations do for you.’



214



28

Nov 16, 2020



Their support was vital in the campaign to reduce the voting age to 16 here in the UK, which was bitterly fought over through the whole of 2024 – with all the major parties eventually committing to introduce such a measure in their General Election Manifestos. Many other countries introduced similar legislation at that time – and Rise Up clearly had a lot to do with that.

To be honest, I think we were all a bit shattered by Rise Up, and by everything that happened before the end of 2023 – which I’m coming back to in a moment.

For many of us, the focus shifted back to our schools, colleges and universities, to the places where we lived and the challenges we faced in our own communities. I got back from a visit to Mumbai in April, and immediately got involved in a whole lot of local issues.

As it happens, our Council was one of the first to be involved in the new integrated Health and Social Care Authorities – HESCA for short. What that meant was that more money became available for preventative healthcare services, rising by a minimum percentage every year. As I explained in Chapter 2, one of the craziest things about the NHS at the start of the decade was that so little money was allocated to helping people stay healthy. But COVID-19 had changed all that – big time!

For instance, our Health and Social Care Commissioners can now allocate significant resources to help GPs focus on active lifestyles, healthy diets, health-promoting activities (both physical and mental) and so on. For all sorts of reasons, there used to be a lot of people in our area stuck on prescription drugs for depression and anxiety. All our GPs can now prescribe ‘Green Gym courses’ as an alternative – with patients signed up to work with local conservation groups on supporting the local environment.

This has been brilliant for them (first and foremost!), and for the National Nature Service that Erin talked about in the last chapter. It’s also been brilliant for the NHS – huge amounts of money are now being saved through improved treatments for diabetes, obesity, mental health problems and so on.

It all seems so obvious now! Back in 2020, for instance, everybody knew that poor quality, badly-insulated housing was a major cause of ill health – with some people returning time after time to their GPs with respiratory problems, chronic coughs and colds, asthma, mental health issues and so on. Just crazy! Under the Government’s extended GreenHomes Scheme (see page 48), GPs and social workers could mandate priority home retrofits – and more than a million homes have been improved in this way since then.



A screenshot of a Twitter post. On the left is the Twitter bird icon. The post is from Janie Toussaint (@Janie Toussaint), with a 'Follow' button and a dropdown arrow. The text of the tweet reads: "Thanks to all who attended our 'Green Homes: Three Years' On seminar yesterday! Particularly powerful testimonies from social housing tenants, as with this from Harry Williams: 'Warmer and better off – what's not to like?!' We've now done 1,115 affordable homes over the last three years, with the full support of all our Health Centres and GPs. Great team effort!". At the bottom, there are 19 likes (red heart icon) and 8 replies (speech bubble icon). The date is Jul 17, 2024.

The key to this post-COVID transformation has been local people taking decisions and working together locally. I reckon it's infectious! It's right here, in our own communities, that things really come alive. And it's these small-scale backyard improvements that have enabled so many young people to think more positively about the future.

Here's another example. Back in 2020, there were just a few trailblazing local authorities using Green Bonds to help address climate and environmental issues – I think West Berkshire claims to have been the first to create a Community Municipal Investment (CMI), offering citizens and communities an opportunity to invest directly (from as little as £5) in local low-carbon projects. Installing rooftop solar panels on schools, and so on. People loved it! West Berkshire now has more than 40 similar schemes – and CMIs have become commonplace across the entire country.

Personally, I'm much more excited by all our food production schemes! We got our first fully automated Community Vertical Farm (funded via the ethical investment platform Abundance) back in 2022, producing vegetables, salad leaves and pulses, using what's called 'hydroponic' technology (with root systems immersed in water) and 100% solar energy. No chemicals needed (because no pests or diseases can get in), so, all organic - and brilliant for us vegans! Their produce was a bit pricier to start with, but not any longer.

And what I really love about this town's thriving Allotments Cooperative (the origins of which go back more than 150 years) became one of the biggest investors in the second Community Vertical Farm that was opened a year later. After all, we're all after the same thing, healthy, nutritious, high quality food, grown locally and consumed locally.



I have to say that our Bangladeshi community has been amazing in all this. I think we were the third place in the UK to welcome Banglaaponics United, combining traditional Bangladeshi aquaculture and horticultural skills with new technology. Carefully selected species of Bangladeshi fish and prawns are reared in heated tanks, with the nutrient-rich waste from this used as the fertiliser for hydroponic production of traditional Bangladeshi vegetables – all of which usually have to be air-freighted from Asia, at considerable expense and with a huge carbon footprint!

FLYING: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Talking of which, I guess we have to talk about flying!

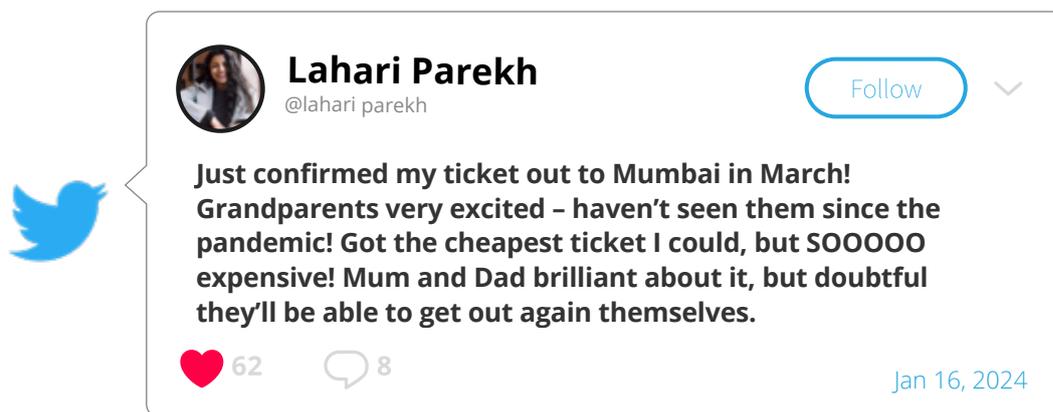
Three years on from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the aviation sector still wasn't

back to where it had been in 2019. There were 65% fewer passengers flying internationally in 2020, and 50% fewer in 2021, still affected by a massive amount of pre-vaccination disruption. Things have recovered since then, but last year (2023), there were still 10% fewer people flying than there were in 2019.

For young people, this has been a bit brutal. Pre-COVID, low-cost airlines kept prices down, ensuring cheap flights to dozens of destinations both in Europe and around the world. We pretty much took this for granted – although it's worth remembering that only 50% of people in the UK would take a flight in any one year.

Even then, however, the impact of flying on global greenhouse gas emissions – with aviation responsible for somewhere between 3% and 4% of total emissions – was causing more and more concern. Campaigns like FlightFree UK were actively discouraging young people from 'just jumping on another flight because you can'. As far back as 2018, people were already talking of their 'shame' at taking regular flights.

Well, those pre-COVID days have gone forever. Young people are flying again, but cheap it is not! Long-haul flights are now prohibitively expensive, and will become even more so over the next few years as the Universal Carbon Charge (see page 84) kicks in.



We get it, from a climate point of view. But not being able to visit places where we have family and friends (for the three of us, that means the USA, India, Bangladesh and New Zealand), let alone those places which we'd just love to learn more about by being there in person rather than through some kind of Virtual Reality experience, just feels like a real loss – even if the range and quality of VR products is now quite extraordinary! And given that roughly 80% of the world's population has still never set foot on a plane, and probably never will, it's only right that we should continue to see flying as an incredible privilege.

It's possible that might change in the future. Before the pandemic, much of the industry had been in complete denial about the Climate Emergency, foolishly thinking that people would just accept that it was OK for aviation's carbon footprint to go on rising every year – even as every other sector worked harder and harder to reduce its footprint! This was the CEO of one of America's biggest airlines speaking out back in 2019:

“Environmental stewardship is the biggest threat to our future ability to grow”
- Ed Bastian, CEO, Delta

In the last four years, however, some experts believe there has been as much technological progress as there had been in the previous 40 years.

The problem, of course, is what to use instead of jet fuel – the source of the greenhouse gas emissions, just like the petrol and diesel we burn in cars and trucks. Even if jet engines and planes get to be more efficient every year, requiring less jet fuel in the first place, the alternatives are all so much more expensive. But that’s now changing.

At the start of this year, six European airlines were flying regular short-haul flights using hybrid technology – part conventional jet fuel, part super-efficient Ultrafast batteries pioneered by Rolls-Royce back in 2021. (Norway is the out-and-out market leader here, having pledged that all short-haul flights in Norway would have to be all-electric – not even hybrid – by 2040!) And battery technologies just go on getting better and cheaper every year.

But batteries are still very heavy – so not much good for long-haul flights. There’s now a different kind of hybrid being tested around the world: part conventional jet fuel and part ‘SAF’ (Sustainable Aviation Fuel), using advanced fermentation and other technologies to convert solid and liquid waste into the exact equivalent of jet fuel. And the first hydrogen-powered, 19-seater planes were being tested here in the UK by the end of the year.

Some of these technologies have been around for years – but because conventional jet fuel was always so much cheaper, there was literally no incentive to get them developed. Now there is! And the fact that more than 30 countries are now requiring airlines to use a minimum of between 5% and 10% SAF, by the end of this year, has provided just the encouragement that was needed.

It’s still going to be an uphill battle for the aviation sector. It will never be the industry it once was. Young people will never fly the way they once did.

But Jesse still thinks there might be a ‘next generation breakthrough’ before 2040: net zero emission planes fuelled by hydrogen. Back in 2020, the aerospace giant Airbus launched its MissionH – as it came to be known – ‘to revolutionise the aviation sector and ensure emissions-free, guilt-free flying through to the end of the century’. However, there’s still a big problem: the world is going to need vast amounts of clean, green hydrogen (made from renewable electricity rather than with dirty old gas or coal!) for all sorts of decarbonising purposes long before it becomes available to the airlines.

I’m still hopeful that I may still get to spend more time with my family in India – eventually! I mentioned I was in Mumbai earlier in the year – and that turned out to be a lot more eventful than I was counting on, all because of my asthma.

I’ve always hated being asthmatic – one of around a million kids in the UK. I was 15 back in December 2020 when the inquest into the death of Ella Kissi-Debrah, a nine-year-old girl living in South London, linked her death to chronic levels of air pollution (see page 17). This turned out to be a landmark ruling – with one court case after another eventually forcing both the Government and local councils to enforce clean air standards.

Campaigns of this kind were going on all around the world. Research back in 2021 showed that around eight and a half million people were dying from air pollution every year. That’s twice the COVID-19 death toll in 2020 and 2021 combined – every single year!

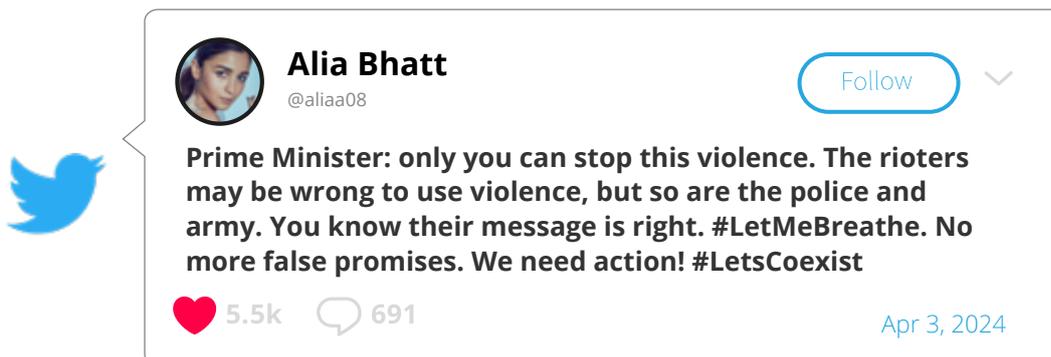


Rosamund Kissi-Debrah was giving evidence at a second inquest into her daughter's death
But here's what happened in India.

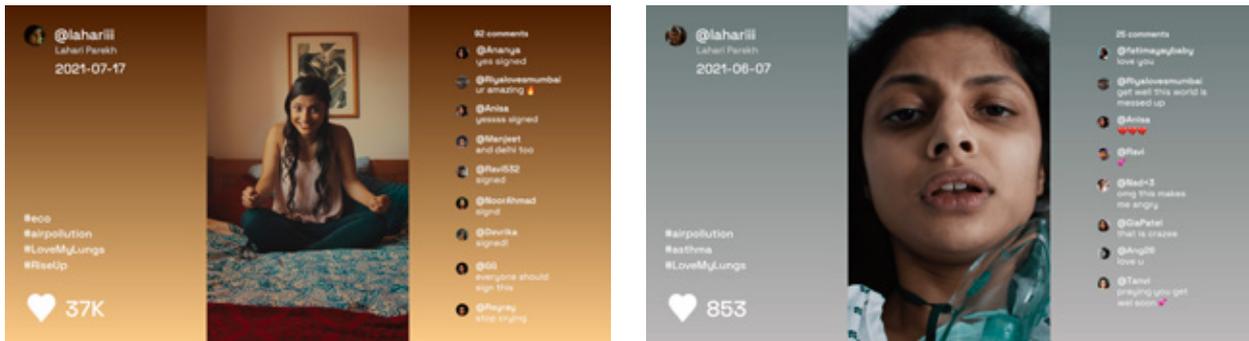
#LetMeBreathe

The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi had been notoriously slow to address India's chronic air pollution issues. In February and March of that year, many of India's largest cities found themselves shrouded yet again in lethal smogs. But this time it was different: under COVID-19 lockdowns back in 2020 and 2021, Indian citizens had experienced what it was like to be able to breathe deeply and to be able to look up and see the horizon – a precious interlude in their smog-bound lives. At that time, outdoor air pollution was killing at least 1.2 million people in India a year. More than a million people – every year! At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, there had been around 200,000 deaths in India. Do the maths: air pollution was killing roughly six times as many people as COVID-19 – every year!

Things kicked off in Mumbai on March 10th as #LetMeBreathe exploded onto the streets of more than 30 Indian cities, shutting down roads and whole districts, paralysing economic activity. The timing couldn't have been worse for Modi, with the General Election due in May. But his heavy-handed attempts to put down the protests down backfired completely. Widespread rioting and civil disorder persisted for more than three weeks, even as the smogs began to clear, with more than 100 people losing their lives – including 25 in Mumbai.



My grandmother had refused to let me join the protests, as my asthma was getting worse and worse. So bad, in fact, that I had to fly back to the UK early after a week or so in hospital.



Lahari before hospital (on the left) and in hospital (on the right).

So what happened? Well, Modi is one smart political operator. So eventually he changed course before it was too late, giving in to the demands of #LetMeBreathe, while pretending it was all his idea in the first place! His entire Election campaign then focused on energy, transport and a ‘Green Industrial Revolution’ – one of Boris Johnson’s favourite catch phrases!

But that wasn’t the end of it: #LetMeBreathe lived on – in China! President Xi Jinping took a long hard look at what was going on in India, very aware of the fact that tens of millions of middle-class Chinese citizens felt at least as strongly about being able to breathe – with more than a million premature deaths every year from air pollution. At the annual meeting of the National People’s Congress in April 2024, Xi Jinping pushed through an emergency law overriding the power of city mayors (whose political success often depends on China’s still hugely powerful coal industry) to enforce ‘the clean-up, closure or translocation’ of all coal-fired power stations and other polluting industrial facilities within 10km of all major city centres. Party officials who were seen to be resisting this law would be summarily imprisoned.

At the same time, he confirmed that the deadline for prohibiting the sale of any new petrol and diesel vehicles across the whole of China would be by the end of 2030 – the same as our ban here in the UK. That was massive.

THE (FAILED) POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

These upheavals in India and China were driven primarily by concerns about air quality, rather than concerns about climate change as such. They’re very closely connected, of course, but people’s responses are so different. ‘Not being able to breathe’ is obviously what people call ‘a real and present danger’, whereas climate change, even after Rise Up, still wasn’t seen as an out-and-out emergency.

Worse yet, many politicians were still finding it really difficult to break free of their addiction to fossil fuels. At any stage over the last 20 years, politicians could have intervened to support new technologies, to discourage the use of fossil fuels, to force oil and gas companies to clean up their act and start paying for the massive damage they were doing to the climate and to people’s health.

Throughout that time, however, they did exactly the opposite: they continued to subsidise fossil fuels. At the time of Rise Up in 2023, subsidies for fossil fuels in the UK were still

running at an astonishing £12 billion a year. Not only were they making it legal for fossil fuel companies to go on dumping all those costs on people and the planet – they were actually paying them handsomely to go on doing so – with taxpayers’ money! Globally, things were even more appalling, as revealed by the International Monetary Fund.



The image shows a screenshot of a tweet from the Office of the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (@IMFNews). The tweet is titled "'Modest progress on fossil fuel subsidies'" and contains the following text: "Our report in May 2019 calculated total global subsidies (direct and indirect) for fossil fuels at \$5.2 trillion. That was an astonishing 6.5% of total global GDP. This sum included \$500 billion of direct subsidies for both producers and consumers. We called on all world leaders to honour their repeated pledges urgently to start phasing out all subsidies. Five years on, that figure now stands at \$4.7 trillion, of which \$425 billion goes directly to producers and consumers. This can only be described as very modest progress in the midst of a Climate Emergency." The tweet has 60 likes and 4 replies, and is dated Nov 26, 2024. A blue Twitter bird icon is visible on the left side of the tweet.

I guess it's only now, with all the climate shocks of the last few years, culminating in the political shock of Rise Up, that ordinary citizens are starting to come to terms with the extent of that political failure. Of that staggering betrayal of every single young person alive today, and all those yet to be born.

So were the politicians genuinely committed by the end of 2024? Sorry about this, but to answer that question, I need first to join up the dots between COP26 in Glasgow (at the end of 2021) and COP29 at the end of 2024.

COP26 IN GLASGOW: WHY GOOD INTENTIONS FAIL!

As I explained on page 39, the Glasgow Conference at the end of 2021 was so much better than it might have been, after months of non-stop campaigning by young people. 'Net Zero by 2050' was the overall headline, and it was this which allowed world leaders to declare the outcome of Glasgow as 'a triumph of global diplomacy'.

However, it became apparent by the middle of 2022 that the final Agreement was made up more of empty promises than serious commitments.

- Some countries genuinely 'got it', and signed up in good faith, with a serious intent to deliver. Including the UK.
- Many countries had just worked out what it was that the international community wanted them to say, and went ahead and said it.
- Many countries had done no detailed action planning to account for how they would get to Net Zero by 2050, and had no plans for doing that detailed planning!
- Many poorer countries may well have signed up in good faith, but most poorer countries knew they would only be able to achieve their targets with massive financial backing from

rich-world countries – many of which had no intention of making good on those promises.

There were two big problems here:

1. As we said before, banging on and on about 2050 was rapidly turning out to have been a big mistake. Politicians hardly ever think beyond the next election, let alone over thirty years! It simply let the politicians off the hook in terms of the immediate future.

Five years on, we've learned the hard way that any hope of achieving Net Zero by 2050 depends almost entirely on what gets done by 2030.

2. Worse yet, everything was still voluntary. That approach had worked well in negotiating the famous Paris Agreement back in 2015 – it was the only way of getting reluctant countries like the US, China, India and Brazil to start negotiating properly. But the voluntary approach simply wasn't working any longer – as the record shows all too clearly.

At first, it looked as if global greenhouse gas emissions had plateaued in 2016. But they started going up again in 2017, and apart from 2020 (the year of the pandemic) continued upwards until 2022 when they started going down – but only very slowly.

And because everything in the Glasgow Agreement was still voluntary, there was just no mechanism for holding governments to account for their continuing inaction.

Fast-forward to the end of 2022 – COP27 in Cairo. The pace of change was still hopelessly inadequate – not even the near-collapse of the global reinsurance industry (see page 51) was enough to persuade governments to give up on the voluntary approach that was so obviously failing. A massive row had broken out when the EU joined forces with other progressive countries (led by New Zealand and Costa Rica) and the Small Island States to propose that there should instead be a binding International Treaty, overseen by a completely independent Agency working under the UN Security Council. With punitive sanctions for countries that failed to deliver.

The stakes couldn't have been higher. But so many countries (including, I'm sorry to say, both the UK and the USA) opposed this radical step so that it was never actually voted on before COP27 ground to a halt – with a lot of bitterness on all sides.

KEEPING TRACK!

THOSE CONFERENCES OF THE PARTIES:

2021 COP26 Glasgow

2022 COP27 Cairo

2023 COP28 Detroit

2024 COP29 Beijing

2025 COP30 Rio de Janeiro

THE IMPACT OF RISE UP

And so to COP28 in Detroit in 2023 – just a few weeks after the Rise Up protests. Two young climate activists – Emmett Johnson and Brianna Martinez – had been killed in the Rise Up protests on the streets of Detroit.



Emmett Johnson (left) and Brianna Martinez (right).

Detroit had been chosen to host COP28 not only to mark the hugely welcome return of the USA as a critical player in climate negotiations under President Biden, but also to celebrate Detroit’s ongoing reinvention of itself as a green and socially just city.

After the shocking events of Rise Up, it looked as if COP28 would have to be cancelled. But Mike Duggan (re-elected as Mayor of Detroit for an extraordinary third term in November 2021, and a great buddy of Joe Biden’s) did something remarkable: he assured all young climate justice campaigners across the USA that they would be welcome, as would all campaigners for social justice and racial equality. ‘We’re in the mess we’re in today because we think that all these are separate issues. They’re not. They’re all symptoms of a failed economic system, and we want all of you to help us put that right. We need COP28 to work to honour the lives of Brianna and Emmett.’

 **Juanita Martinez** @Juanita Martinez [Follow](#)

Harriet and I are still mourning the death of our beautiful children, Emmett and Brianna.

But we don't want their deaths to have been in vain. We support the Mayor in his support for #RiseUp, #BLM, #NoGoingBack. So please: Get involved in @COP28 here in Detroit - with love and peace in your hearts.

28 5 Oct 14, 2024

Detroit in November is cold! So Mike Duggan persuaded a number of big Democratic Party donors to set up a special fund to reimburse the tens of thousands of Detroit families who volunteered to have the campaigners stay with them – ClimateB&B! – for the ten-day Conference.

It's still known as the Miracle of Detroit. More than 75,000 young US, Canadian and Mexican citizens accepted the Mayor's invitation, 'working together in the name of young people all around the world', alongside huge numbers of scientists and

academics, business and faith leaders, indigenous people, journalists and artists, civil society organisations and NGOs. Massive efforts were made to minimise their combined carbon footprint, and almost all participants outside of the Americas chose to get involved online.

But almost all of the world's leaders were there in person (without the huge delegations seen at previous COPs!), including all those who hadn't planned to attend but then changed their plans 'out of respect' for those who had lost their lives in Rise Up. No-one wanted to be seen to be on the wrong side of that particular moment of history. Even President Putin. Even President Xi Jinping.

Somehow, it all came together. The Emergency Session of the UN Security Council at the end of October – which had been summoned to bring an end to the Rise Up protests – had agreed the following Resolution, agreed by all Security Council member, including the USA, China and Russia:

'Recognising the limited progress made on reducing global emissions of greenhouse gases over the last decade, all nation states must now come together to agree a new international agreement to address today's Climate Emergency.'

With that mandate, three momentous decisions were unanimously agreed in Detroit on the final day of COP28:

1. That a binding International Treaty should be negotiated within one year, to be agreed in principle at COP29 at the end of 2024, to be confirmed by the end of 2025, and to be ratified within the shortest period of time after that.
2. That a new body (the International Climate Change Authority) should be set up under the aegis of the UN Security Council, with significant powers to ensure compliance with the terms of the new Treaty as soon as it was ratified.
3. That the Treaty should be underpinned by a binding agreement to fix a global price for every tonne of CO_{2e} emitted as of 1st January 2026 (to be known as the Universal Carbon Charge), with each nation determining for itself how best to implement the required charge and how best to use the resulting revenues, with rich nations stepping up to assist poorer nations in managing the impacts of this carbon tax.

Job done. Twenty years too late, for sure, but JOB DONE!

And if anybody tells you that all of this would have happened anyway, without Rise Up, just look them in the eye and ask them to remember, somewhat more respectfully, both the lives and the deaths of those 46 young climate activists.

CHAPTER 6: 2025

By Jesse Baldwin



**ELECTIONS,
WELLBEING, AND A
NEW CLIMATE TREATY**





Photo credit: DoD photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Kevin Tanenbaum

PRESIDENT HARRIS STEPS UP!

It's hard to imagine a more upbeat start to the year than the Inauguration of Kamala Harris as the first woman President of the USA. And the first woman of colour at that!

Astonishingly, there were nearly two million people who turned out for that Inauguration, thronging the National Mall, a number which had the increasingly poisonous Donald Trump regurgitating some of his 'fake news' tweets from 2017 when less than half a million turned out for his Inauguration. Just four years on from the most divisive, misogynistic and racist man ever to have held that office, the election of Kamala Harris was a chance for an increasingly diverse USA to redefine itself in a rapidly changing world.

Joe Biden had done America proud. First and foremost, he proved to be a real healer, living up to his promise of being President for all Americans, not just Democratic voters. He went out of his way to try and restore some kind of bipartisan mechanisms for working with the Republican Party, sorting out the pandemic by the end of 2021, injecting trillions of dollars into improving the lives of poor and middle-class Americans, whilst creating millions of new jobs by addressing the climate crisis.

In the process, he'd not just brought America back into the community of nations, but somehow made it possible again for people in the free world to look to America as a beacon of hope. Ill health meant Joe Biden couldn't stand again in 2024. But he'd done just enough to ensure that the Presidential Election that year was a great deal less divisive than the most bitter of all Elections back in 2020.

The vast majority of US citizens could see for themselves that so much more needed to be done to heal America and to rebuild its shattered infrastructure – housing, water and sewerage, inner cities, transport and so on. President Biden had successfully positioned his

Administration so that it was no longer seen as 'the enemy of the people', as it had been under President Trump, but as an effective enabler, working again in partnership with State Governors, City Mayors and leading US companies.

'Government is not the solution to our problems, Government IS the problem.'
- Ronald Reagan, January 1981

'The Government isn't some foreign force in a distant capital, it's us, all of us. We are the People'
- Joe Biden, March 2021

Forty years following a false dogma!

True enough, the US economy has only grown by around 1.5% per annum since the COVID-19 pandemic, raising serious concerns about how all this was going to be paid for. But that was true for almost all industrial nations – especially here in the UK. 'Post-growth' seems to be the favourite way of talking about this shift: it's not that countries don't still measure growth, in terms of per capita income and national GDP, but nobody seems to think that countries like ours will ever return to higher rates of growth. These days, we're more and more focused on wellbeing.

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WELLBEING

As it happens, UK politicians, from Tony Blair onwards, could often be heard prattling on about the importance of wellbeing. David Cameron used to get particularly pumped up about it. When he was Prime Minister, the Government's Office of National Statistics developed one of the most sophisticated wellbeing 'dashboards' anywhere in the world, with lots of different indicators covering health, happiness, education, relationships, work satisfaction, personal finance and so on.

Sadly, none of this ever seemed to make any difference once the next General Election came round – when all that mattered, as per usual, was which party could promise more Growth than all the other parties! Which may explain why the UK comes so far down the league tables when measuring wellbeing in young people.

Wellbeing can also be something of an empty vessel – unless it has hard-edged social justice at its heart. Prescribing 'mindfulness', or trotting out clichés like 'happiness depends on

health and friends, not money' can be deeply insulting to the millions of people in the UK who were still living in poverty. Simply increasing the income of the least well-off is one of the best ways of ensuring greater wellbeing – as our Council Leader, Janie Toussaint, keeps pointing out.



Anyway, as you all know, this debate about wellbeing had a big impact on the outcome of the General Election in October 2024 last year, with the opposition parties choosing to campaign on just three big priorities:

1. DOUBLING DOWN ON INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Conservatives got a lot of credit for setting up those Health and Social Care Authorities back in 2022, which have proved to be very successful (see page 75). And they also got a lot of credit for having spent two years between 2022 and 2024 developing an all-party consensus, on the funding of social care. This had been hugely controversial for years and years, not just since the pandemic.

But then, for whatever reason, they squandered that advantage by refusing to provide proper funding for what had been agreed, sticking to its usual story of being 'the party of low taxes'.

By contrast, all the opposition parties agreed that this had to be sorted out once and for all, given how many older people's lives were being devastated by social care not being properly funded – and that the only way of doing this would be for Income Tax to rise by 2p in the pound for all but the least well-off. A huge risk, but it paid off big-time.

2. PLEDGING THEIR FULL SUPPORT TO INTRODUCE A FAIRER VOTING SYSTEM FOR THE UK AS A WHOLE BEFORE THE NEXT ELECTION

Just to remind you why this was so important: the UK is still the only country in Europe that has to put up with the blatant injustices of our first-past-the-post system. In March 2025, the new Coalition Government announced there would be two Referendums to sort out voting reform: the first in May 2027, at the same time as the Local Elections, to see if voters agree with the idea of proportional representation in principle. If it turns out that we do, then there will be a second Referendum a year later to agree the actual system.

And while we're talking about voting reform, let's not forget that all parties went into that Election with manifesto pledges in favour of reducing the voting age to 16! At last!

I unearthed this tweet from Angie Carter, Youth Director of Make Votes Matter, from September 2024:



Lady Davidson: 'fully paid-up member of Votes at 16' – in her own words!

3. THE THIRD BIG THING THAT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES DID IN THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTION WAS TO PROPOSE 'A CITIZENS' INCOME'

At its simplest, a Universal Basic Income is paid, as of right, to all citizens above the age of 16, regardless of their income. The debate about this (also referred to as a Citizens' Income) has been rumbling along for a long time, in countries all around the world.

There's no doubt that it was COVID-19 that changed the nature of this debate from something that got lots of academics and political activists all excited, to a seriously 'big idea' that could transform the relationship between individual citizens and the state. But it was unemployment that forced it up the agenda.

Continuing high unemployment over four years (it's never dropped below 5% since the pandemic) has meant that many people are no longer persuaded that 'we're all in this together'. It didn't look that way during the pandemic, and it certainly doesn't now.

As we mentioned back in Chapter 2 (see page 35), tech-driven automation has steadily reduced the number of people in full-time, well-paid work. It's also reduced the conditions and security of whatever work has been available – as with the millions of people in the gig economy. Against that backdrop, demands for a new social contract just grew and grew.

Anyway, four years on from the pandemic, a lot of people had been swayed by the argument that some kind of Citizens' Income would help counter the impact of accelerating automation on employment, provide better economic security for huge numbers of people, help protect purchasing power in the economy, streamline the existing benefits system, address chronic inequality in our society, support the unpaid care sector (this was a big one for the 6.5 million carers in the UK), and eventually open up the possibility of moving to a four-day working week to ensure that available work can be spread around more fairly.

Personally (sorry, Erin – as I know you're a big fan of Citizens Income!), I'm not sure that a Citizens' Income actually solves anything in itself. But I can see that it will make it easier for governments, entrepreneurs and citizens to work together more effectively to help solve things, especially at the local level. So much depends on citizens being actively involved in helping to shape these solutions.

ANOTHER VIRUS – AND THE RISE OF THE SUPERBUGS!

And that sometimes means insisting that our politicians eventually do what they know they should be doing, but just don't – often because they're 'in the pocket' of some very powerful business interests. And there are few more powerful business interests than the global meat industry, or Big Meat, as Jesse explained back in Chapter 3.

We really didn't need the threat of another pandemic to end the stranglehold that Big Meat has on today's massively unhealthy food economy. But that's what it took. Out of the blue, H1N1 swine flu came back to haunt us in June 2025, as you'll all remember very well given the panic that gripped the world for the best part of three months.

First, a quick flashback. Just 16 years ago, during the Obama Presidency in 2009, there were 61 million cases of a novel strain of swine flu in the USA, with 275,000 people hospitalised, and at least 14,000 deaths. Unlike COVID-19, a high percentage of hospitalised cases (about 40%) were amongst people below the age of 25. To be fair, statistically speaking, the risk of serious illness or death from the 2009 H1N1 virus was not that much more than that from yearly seasonal flu – but it certainly put the wind up public health experts at the time, worried about the possibility of this particular virus evolving into something much more dangerous.

They were right to be worried. The 2025 strain of H1N1, transmitted to humans from pigs

raised in massive factory farms, was a very different story. It was highly infectious, and it killed 60% of workers in those factory farms who came into contact with it. And a significant percentage of people who came into contact with those infected workers. Big farms in North Carolina and Minnesota were particularly badly affected.



Tracy Worcester

Farms Not Factories

@TracyWorcester

Follow

Tyson and other big meat companies acting all surprised at H1N1 outbreak! REALLY?! Campaigners have been warning for years this was inevitable. The blame lies with Big Meat – and them alone – for every single one of these tragic deaths. Government must act to close down these factories of death.



17



5

Jun 3, 2025

It's all very fresh in our memories, so I don't need to go on about it here. Around 150,000 people died, despite the draconian lockdown that President Harris imposed as soon as the problem was identified. More than 15 million pigs had to be put down.



Photo credit: Andy Johnstone, The Daily Mail

Amazingly, it was contained within just six weeks – and we all breathed a little bit more freely. Only to be shocked by the discovery in August of similar strains in Poland, Denmark and here in the UK. Vets had been put on high alert, with all affected units immediately locked down and hundreds of thousands of pigs slaughtered.

Everyone agrees we got off lightly – yet again. For years and years, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had been warning politicians that keeping pigs in totally inhumane factory conditions was 'guaranteed', at some stage, to cause another of those spillover events from animals to humans. And that explains why President Harris went a lot

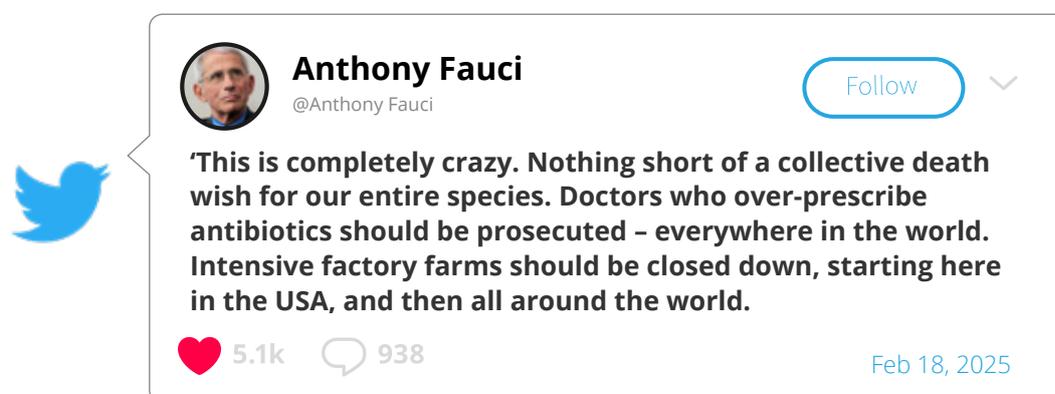
further in her robust response to H1N1, immediately imposing stocking densities and welfare standards on the entire pig meat industry across the whole of the USA, acknowledging this would raise prices – but would save US taxpayers countless billions of dollars in the long run.

This wasn't just because of H1N1. In fact, as she explained, it was more to do with fears about the increase in antibiotic resistance that was building up in more and more bacteria.

In the aftermath of the H1N1 outbreak, with many Americans shocked at how close they'd come to something much worse than COVID-19, public health officials were able to make the case that all intensive meat factories (for cattle and poultry as well as for pigs) posed an even greater threat to human health than the occasional spill-over disease – on account of their massive overuse of antibiotics.

It was well known that this was a major factor behind more and more bacteria becoming resistant to the use of antibiotics – the other being the over-prescribing of antibiotics by doctors giving in to pressure from their patients to prescribe antibiotics - even when they know they will make no difference whatsoever!

Concern about so-called 'superbugs' had been growing for more than a decade. Back in 2020, more than a million people around the world died because of antibiotic resistance; last year, that number exceeded five million. In 2020, the CDC listed 18 TDRs (Totally Drug Resistant bacteria); last year, that number had risen to 49. This was the comment from Dr Fauci (still going strong at 84, and as outspoken as ever after he was honoured with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2022) when those figures were released in February this year:



He was right to highlight the USA. Total antibiotic use in the US livestock industry was seven times higher last year than in the UK. Back in 2022, both the UK and the EU had banned the use of antibiotics for preventative purposes in treating livestock (used to reduce the risk of disease outbreaks amongst animals that should never be kept in such utterly inhumane, overcrowded conditions anyway). But such practices were still widespread in the USA.

#StillRisingUp!

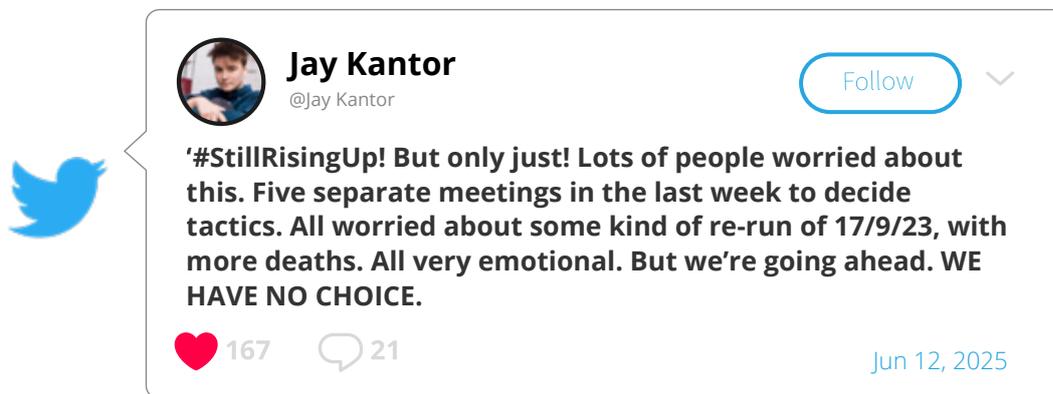
Viruses and superbugs dominated the media (and our fears!) between June and September last year. In fact, right up until September 17th – which marked the second anniversary of the Rise Up movement and the death of those 46 young people.

The first anniversary, in 2024, had been marked with silent vigils all around the world. The 'Miracle of Detroit' had not been forgotten, and there was no doubt that governments

around the world were really ramping up their support for low-carbon technologies. I guess we were all prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt at that time.

But one year on from that, with yet more climate disasters disrupting the lives of yet more millions of people all over the world, with financial costs rising every year, it wasn't so clear-cut. There seemed to be a lot of foot-dragging going on. A lot of 'say one thing, do another'.

This really pissed us off! Discussions started in June amongst the vast network of young climate activist organisations that first got involved in Rise Up back in 2023. It was reluctantly (and very controversially) decided we had to 'get back on the streets to keep the flame alive'. #StillRisingUp! Just for one day, on 17th September. No confrontations and no violence. No repeat of what happened in 2023.



And it was pretty bloody amazing! Though the police are still arguing about the numbers, we reckon there were almost a million young people involved in completely peaceful demonstrations of one kind or another here in the UK. And it looks as if there might have been as many as 70 million young people involved around the world, making it **BY FAR THE LARGEST DEMONSTRATION THAT HAS EVER BEEN SEEN IN THE HISTORY OF HUMANKIND!**

All this served to pile on yet more pressure on the politicians, reminding them that emissions of greenhouse gases may well have peaked in 2022, but had only just started to go down. And nothing like as fast as they needed to.

Here's how it all unfolded, going back to that momentous decision taken at the end of the Detroit Conference (COP28) in 2023:

'That a binding International Treaty should be negotiated in one year, to be agreed in principle at COP29 by the end of 2024, to be confirmed by the end of 2025, and to be ratified within the shortest period of time after that.'

Lots of climate experts had described that moment as 'momentous' – because that's exactly what it was! For more than 30 years before that, governments had gone to great lengths to keep everything voluntary. They hated the idea of being held to account by an independent, science-based body (the International Climate Change Authority). But that's what they'd signed up to in Detroit. With the eyes of the world on them in the aftermath of Rise Up.

In effect, they'd been shamed into doing exactly what they didn't want to do.

One year on, in November 2024, COP29 duly took place in Beijing. China was then super-keen to demonstrate its readiness to 'lead the world' in addressing the Climate Emergency, and felt it had a serious claim to make on that score in terms of its reduction in coal use, introduction of electric vehicles, and so on. (Even so, China was still by far the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, and still is today!)

At the same time, the USA had just seen Kamala Harris elected as its new President. And after two years getting used to their own Carbon Dividend (introduced through the Low Carbon Prosperity Act back in 2022 (see page 53), which distributes the proceeds of a carbon tax to all citizens on a strict per capita basis), the idea of a new Treaty no longer seemed that big a deal.

As to other powerful nations, President Putin had never recovered from his possible involvement in the killing of three young climate activists in Moscow on 17th September 2023. He was desperate to try and restore his reputation, especially as Opposition leader Alexei Navalny was way ahead of him in the polls, and making a big impact with his Climate Action Plan. (All dictatorships come to an end eventually!). This was one of Erin's tweets at that time!



Prime Minister Modi had gone 'full solar' in India's 2024 General Election, having eventually found a way of sorting out the country's coal barons. (Basically, by paying them off!) Jair Bolsonaro was just a bad smell from the past, and President Lula da Silva had worked wonders since his election in 2022 as the 'saviour of the Amazon'. Saudi Arabia and other Middle East producers realised that there was more to be gained by going along with this unstoppable force (with the prospect of deals to be done on compensation in the future) than by trying to prevent it – and hats off to Abu Dhabi, in passing, for so skilfully leading that coalition of oil and gas states.

I guess the truth of it is that, for the first time ever, no country could afford not to be part of this pretty astonishing transformation.

So a draft text of a new Treaty (the International Climate Emergency Treaty – or INCET for short) was eventually agreed after five days of agonised debate in Beijing. It was also agreed that the final text needed to be negotiated without further delay, to be adopted in a year's time at the 2025 Conference of the Parties in Rio de Janeiro. The remit for the International Climate Change Authority was also agreed, so that it could be up and running by the end of 2025, reporting directly to the UN's General Assembly. All good, as they say!

However, six months on, by the middle of 2025, neither China nor Russia had actually signed off that final text, despite their promises to that effect. And the USA was still kicking up rough on the powers that the new Climate Change Authority should have.

To us, it felt as if we were right back into the same old trade-offs between competing nation states, into exactly the kind of short-term politics which had made progress on addressing the Climate Emergency all but impossible over the last 30 years.

Hence the need for #StillRisingUp! With 70 million of us making it clear that this was absolutely not acceptable.

Who knows what will happen in a month's time at COP30 in Rio de Janeiro? But to have had 70 million young people asserting their interests in calling for INCET to be formally adopted, without any further delay, driven by tens of millions of supporters of the Good Ancestor Project all around the world, was a pretty big deal.

The four of us got talking about all of this immediately after #StillRisingUp on September 17th. We were all pretty energised by being part of such an incredible happening – but, in a rather odd kind of way, a bit down.

It sometimes feels as if young people are being asked to act as the moral conscience of the adult world. But it's just not right that we should be the ones holding them to account, month by month, year by year. It's just not right that the main advocates for what is meant by 'intergenerational justice' should be us, for all our lack of experience, rather than those in positions of formal responsibility and leadership. And it's just not right that we should be the true guardians of today's climate science, ensuring that the adult world can no longer obscure that science, gloss it, deny it, sideline it – always to make life more convenient for themselves.

'Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.' How many times have we been invited to reflect on these words in our Civic Studies sessions! Well, I suppose we're here today to remind all those keen defenders of liberty and democracy that the privilege of liberty depends on having a habitable planet on which to live free.

No habitable planet, no liberty. No human rights. No justice of any kind. No prospects for a better world for anybody here on Earth today. Or for anybody coming after us in the future.

That is it that makes it so unbelievably difficult for adults to understand that?

*****Breaking news as of November 31st: the International Climate Emergency Treaty was formally adopted today by all countries!**

Binding commitment to halve emissions of greenhouse gases within the next eight years!***

CHAPTER 7: 2020-2025
By Erin Wilson



**LOOKING BACK ON THOSE
FIVE IMPOSSIBLE YEARS
(FROM MARCH 2026)**



CLOSER TO HOME

Time to take stock, going back to our original question:

'In a global poll of a hundred thousand people below the age of 25, first carried out in July 2020, 73% agreed with this statement: "The world in 2030 will be a great deal worse than it is today." That poll has been repeated every year since then. In July 2025, that percentage had fallen to 29%. What do you think explains that dramatic shift in the expectations of young people looking ahead to 2030 and beyond?'

In the first chapter, I mentioned that all three of us scored the year 2020 either 2 or 3 out of 10. Last week, we did a quick check on how we might score 2025. I gave it a 6, Jesse gave it a 7, and Lahari scored it as an 8!



Hard at work sorting out our report!

That may have something to do with the fact that Lahari has lived in this town all her life. Jesse has lived here since 2016, and I'm the newcomer, having arrived just six years ago. But Lahari has witnessed some of the smaller changes in our day-to-day lives more accurately than the two of us. To prove the point, she took us on a walk down memory lane – well, the High Street, as it happens!

Pre-COVID-19, our High Street was much like any other – mostly shops, some offices, a couple of pubs and restaurants, charity shops and so on. Already pedestrianised, but in a really boring way, just with a weird collection of benches made out of recycled plastic. When everything was closing down at the time of the pandemic, it really did look pretty grim. We featured fairly regularly in standard 'death of the High Street' articles!

As we know, the COVID-19 lockdowns dramatically accelerated the move to online shopping, a trend that's just carried on since then. Because of that move to online

shopping, there are now far fewer shops – but more of them are local rather than branches of national chains - and far fewer fast-food outlets as well. Despite all that, there's more life on the High Street now than ever before!

Remember #NoGoingBack? A real grassroots movement made up of hundreds of organisations determined to ensure that as many good things as possible should come out of the horror story of COVID-19. Well, full marks to our Council! In April 2021, it secured a £9.5 million grant from the Government's Active Travel Fund, and set about transforming not just the High Street, but the surrounding area. The pedestrianised bit of the High Street is now bursting with life – planters, shrubs, small trees and even some Veg Patches coordinated by our local Incredible Edible group – which Lahari works with as a volunteer. But much more exciting than that, our Green Corridor Scheme was also launched that year, and is now part of an even more ambitious Green Spaces Strategy.



The Green Corridors connect up the town centre to the outskirts, and then on to eight outlying villages. Just last week, contractors started digging up both Jarndice Avenue and Oak Road, both of which will now be turned into extended Pocket Parks – 6.5 miles of concrete and tarmac replaced with turf, bushes, trees (including apple and pear trees as well as a few oaks!) and a shared footpath/cycle and e-scooter lane running down the middle.

This would have been literally unthinkable pre-COVID. Our Council just didn't do stuff like that. But all those bloody lockdowns had highlighted the fact that access to green spaces was by no means available to all citizens – and that was certainly the case in our town. By 2022, more than 70% of local authorities in England had adopted a Green Spaces Strategy. Our Council is now on track to triple the amount of green space by 2030.

Back to the High Street. Another thing the Council did in 2021 was to work with landlords to let out their empty shops for so-called 'meanwhile' uses at very low rents. It didn't actually make much difference at first, with so many shops still boarded up, but it soon caught on, and

provided a huge boost to local artists and community organisers. Many of those 'meanwhile entrepreneurs' were then able to take on proper tenancies. Including a large number of social enterprises and cooperatives that have sprung up since COVID-19.

One of those is 'Farms to Feed Us', which moved in at the end of 2021, having first been set up as an online platform in 2020 connecting local farmers and growers with consumers keen to buy direct rather than via retailers. It then joined forces with a couple of Community-Supported Agriculture schemes already active in our area, and now provides a shop window for around 150 farmers within a five-mile radius.

Right next door to Farms to Feed Us is Power4People. When the Local Electricity Bill (first introduced into Parliament in June 2020) finally became law in December 2021, it forced the energy regulator to fast-track community energy projects, making it possible for those schemes to sell directly to local consumers. There were already more than 500 community energy groups in the UK at that time – now there are more than 23,000!

Power4People is doing a brilliant job, and is just one of the organisations working with the Council to provide funding through the kind of Green Bonds that I mentioned on page 76. People love these schemes – mostly solar roofs, but we've also got two big solar arrays on the outskirts of town, owned by us, providing electricity for 2,260 homes. (I was astonished when Jesse's Dad invested a chunk of money in these two schemes! Not that he wanted people to think that he was 'going green', or anything dodgy like that! 'It's just good business sense, Erin. With interest rates stuck at less than 1% I'm making three times as much money out of providing electricity for my neighbours.')

Immediately opposite Power4People is the Banglaponics United Restaurant (see page XX), and next to them is Living Streets, an NGO that promotes walking and cycling and has been the Council's main partner in deploying the grant from the Active Travel Fund. As you'd expect (see page 76), there was a lot of moaning about road closures, as well as about the new cycle lanes and pavement-widening schemes – but not any longer! Car use in the town is down 22% when we last heard, and we can all feel that in terms of better air quality. With her asthma so much more under control, Lahari is celebrating every day!

People are simply using their cars less (or, in rather fewer cases, giving up their cars altogether), but there are also many more people working from home. As the experts predicted, things never went back 'to normal' after COVID-19. Many people adapted, got themselves properly set up for work at home, and now go into their place of work much less often – especially those who used to have long, soul-crushing commutes. This has meant a huge change in office occupancy in our big cities, though demand bounced back a bit from 2022 onwards.

That's not such a big deal for a small town like ours, but the amount of available office space has still shrunk by around 15% over the last five years – and a lot of those old offices have been converted into really good town-centre flats. These now all have to be zero carbon since the new rules came into force at the end of 2021. And that's also had a big impact on existing houses. People4Power shares its office with GreenHomes (see page 48), which has overseen the retrofitting of more than 9,000 houses and flats since 2022.

So there's a lot going on! When people were asked, back in 2021, what would be the most important thing for them as we emerged from the pandemic, almost two-thirds of people said that 'maintaining a renewed sense of community spirit' would be the most important thing. A surprising number commented on 'improved collaboration between local government and

community groups'. That's certainly been the key to revival in our town, creating a completely new sense of purpose, regardless of which political party's in control. Our Council changed hands last year, but it's made no difference to this kind of community-led, low-carbon regeneration – the benefits of which are just so obvious.

As it happens, Jay and I both stood as candidates for the Green Party in those elections – just to stir things up a bit! Didn't do very well, but it was fun – and I learned a lot about dealing with the political 'old guard' who were unbelievably patronising! I'm now involved in a national campaign to get young people to stand in local elections, or to get themselves onto Parish Councils.

But the kind of cross-party support that we have here proves what all the big NGOs were saying throughout the pandemic:

'Getting to grips with the Climate Emergency will not require the kind of sacrifices that dealing with COVID-19 has demanded of us. In fact, it will do exactly the opposite. It will create new jobs (especially for young people), energise communities, help nature heal, and massively improve people's sense of involvement and wellbeing.'

That's from a Friends of the Earth press release back in October 2020. When the three of us were talking about our scores for 2025, one of the reasons that we scored it quite highly was because we were feeling pretty positive about what was going on in our own back yard. This is our home – our place – and things have to start there. Terry Pratchett (one of my all-time favourite authors!) summed it up for me: 'You can't go around building a better world for people. Only people can build a better world for people. Otherwise it's just a cage.'

Literally everyone we've talked to for this project feels that what we're now doing is just that – building a better world for people.

A PERSPECTIVE FROM PLANET EARTH

But we all have another home – our planetary home. Planet Earth. And that's a different story. The good news is that emissions of greenhouse gases have started going down, at long last, by as much as 3% in 2024. Not exactly the 8% reduction that we now need to see every year for the next ten years. But it's a signal that we really can do this.

And we've now got a binding International Treaty (see page 96). We've got 100% scientific consensus since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report (see page 65). We've got a lot of amazing tech in the pipeline, which will help drive down emissions of greenhouse gases in the near future. And, as of next year, we'll have a global carbon price, which looks now as if it will be set at \$60 a tonne of CO₂, rising by \$5 a tonne every year for the next decade. At \$110 a tonne, our use of fossil fuels will be dramatically reduced at that point. This is a huge step forward.

But it's obviously not enough. Climate disasters go on getting worse. The average global temperature continues to tick up – it now looks like we'll exceed that 1.5°C threshold somewhere around 2045. And our politicians are still obsessed as ever with guaranteeing year-on-year economic growth even if all the talk now is about green growth! Much of it doesn't look 'green' to us: we're still losing land, forests, reefs, water, soil – we've seen nothing like the same pace of change on the nature side of things as we have with the climate. And there are still around 75 million more people on Planet Earth at the end of every year than there were at the start of it.

Population is now a big debate – just as it used to be way back in the 1980s and 1990s. Environmental campaigners have been going on about overconsumption in rich world countries for decades – and that remains a critical priority. But overpopulation (both in the rich world and poorer countries) is the other side of that coin.

And it's not just about watching the numbers keep on going up. Or about what's happening in other countries. It gets very personal closer to home. The number of women of childbearing age in the UK who are choosing not to have children because of their fears about accelerating climate change, and about bringing a child into a collapsing world, is also going up all the time. And it's even higher in other European countries.

I find that truly shocking. There have always been plenty of women (and men) who don't want to have children – for all sorts of different reasons – and that's fine, even though they've often ended up being stigmatised for that decision (which is not fine). But many of today's 'birthstrikers', as they're often called, would want to have children in 'normal circumstances' – but not in a world made totally abnormal by the Climate Emergency.

However, as Lahari pointed out to us with all her experience in India, we're still fortunate here in the UK where most women do have that choice. In many, many countries, that's just not the case. Around the world, there are still more than 270 million women who do not. Who can't get access to affordable contraception or to proper family planning and reproductive healthcare services. Many of those women end up having unwanted pregnancies. Worse yet, there are still around 25 million unsafe or illegal abortions every year – a huge public health crisis in itself that just never gets attended to.

That may be about to change as a direct result of some big decisions taken at last year's UN General Assembly, focussing specifically on this 'unmet need for contraception', and promising a massive increase in funding for family planning and reproductive healthcare.

The wheels of justice do indeed turn, but they sometimes seem to turn very slowly. And that still worries us a lot – in terms of justice between different generations. Despite Rise Up in 2023, despite #StillRisingUp last year, despite there being no doubt whatsoever that accelerating climate change is going to have devastating impacts on the lives of all young people, in countries all over the world, through to the end of this century. And maybe well into the next century. But I can't honestly say that many adults seem to be losing much sleep about this!

We checked in with each other on this. Jesse's Dad does care, but in a very laid-back kind of way! Lahari's parents are very practical about doing something about it (including Banglaponics United), and got absolutely enraged when Lahari had a really bad attack of asthma in Mumbai – on account of the appalling air pollution – which meant she had to be hospitalised for several days. Her asthma had been a problem for a long time before that – you should have heard her Mum tearing into a bunch of petrol-heads at a public meeting back in 2022 discussing the Council's proposals for road closures and the extended Pocket Parks!

To be honest, my Mum doesn't really get it. But she knew how close I was to my grandfather (her Dad), and seemed to be really proud of him when he joined me on a couple of protests. That was just before his house in Norfolk, on a beautiful but very exposed bit of coastline, crashed down into the sea after a particularly violent storm. He never got over that, and died a few months later.

GOOD ANCESTORS

He was certainly one of those 'Good Ancestors' I referred to in Chapter 5 (see page 74). Last week, Jesse shared with me this little poem by a guy called Drew Dellinger:

it's 3:23 in the morning
and I can't sleep
because my great great grandchildren
ask me in my dreams
what did you do while the Earth was unravelling?

That makes you think! 'Great great grandchildren'. I checked that out with my Mum. She had no difficulty thinking about any (possible) grandchildren for her, basically because she saw them as mini-versions of me! Great grandchildren was much more difficult, and great great grandchildren completely impossible. So I asked her if she felt she would want 'to do the right thing' as much for her great great grandchildren as for her grandchildren. Or even for me. She gave me a very odd look at that point!

But it's as much their future we're talking about as my future. Or yours, for that matter. It's as if all the adults alive today, running the world, making all the big decisions about the economy, trying in one way or another primarily to make things better for people today, have just laid claim to that future as if that was theirs – not ours!

Dumping all their waste into it (particularly nuclear waste, which will still need to be managed thousands of years into the future), mining the soil (on which our ability to produce good food will always depend), overfishing the oceans (so there won't be any healthy fish populations for us to make use of in the future), raising the temperature of that future world (our world!) so that it will be so much harder for us to have good, stable, secure lives than it has been for them. That's what campaigners mean by 'stealing the future'.

And that's what INTERGENERATIONAL INJUSTICE looks like to the three of us.

Remember that idea of COVID-19 giving us a chance to do things very differently – see page 74 – providing us with a 'portal', with an opportunity to leave behind all the destructive, crazy ideas that have got us into this mess in the first place, and start making the world anew?

Well, five years on, we reckon that portal is still open. We can see some inspiring and exciting aspects of that new world, both here in the place where we live, and around the rest of the world. And we all believe we're beginning to fight free of some of those destructive, crazy ideas that got us into this mess in the first place.

But a lot of people do not want to go through

'HISTORICALLY, PANDEMICS HAVE FORCED HUMANS TO BREAK WITH THE PAST AND IMAGINE THEIR WORLD ANEW. THIS ONE IS NO DIFFERENT. IT IS A PORTAL, A GATEWAY BETWEEN ONE WORLD AND THE NEXT. WE CAN CHOOSE TO WALK THROUGH IT, DRAGGING BEHIND US THE CARCASSES OF OUR PREJUDICE AND HATRED, OUR AVARICE, OUR DATABANKS AND DEAD IDEAS, OUR DEAD RIVERS AND SMOKY SKIES. OR WE CAN WALK THROUGH LIGHTLY, WITH LITTLE LUGGAGE, READY TO IMAGINE ANOTHER WORLD. AND READY TO FIGHT FOR IT.'

- ARUNDHATI ROY

that portal. They still want to go back. And that's because they haven't really understood the true message of COVID-19, even now, five years on.

They still don't seem to understand that we can't possibly prosper if we carry on trashing the environment. They still don't appreciate our total dependence on a healthy, thriving planet. They still show no signs of any humility whatsoever – despite the fact that the entire global economy ground to a halt for the best part of two years because of one tiny little virus! With a price tag of more than \$50 trillion!

They had no choice but to pause for a bit during the pandemic, but they didn't really slow down. They didn't stop to reflect. To take stock. Their reset button had 'business as usual' written all over it.

And they still can't grasp just how sick the planet has become, and how sick we all are because of that. They still don't see that the wildfires, the floods, the droughts, the melting ice, the heatwaves are all signs of deep distress on a planet that really is unravelling in front of our eyes.

They like to say they do. But they don't. Not really.

But many more people do now want to go forward (including every single young person we ever talk to about these things – literally!) and what's good is that more and more adults (particularly more and more grandparents) are prepared to fight for that.

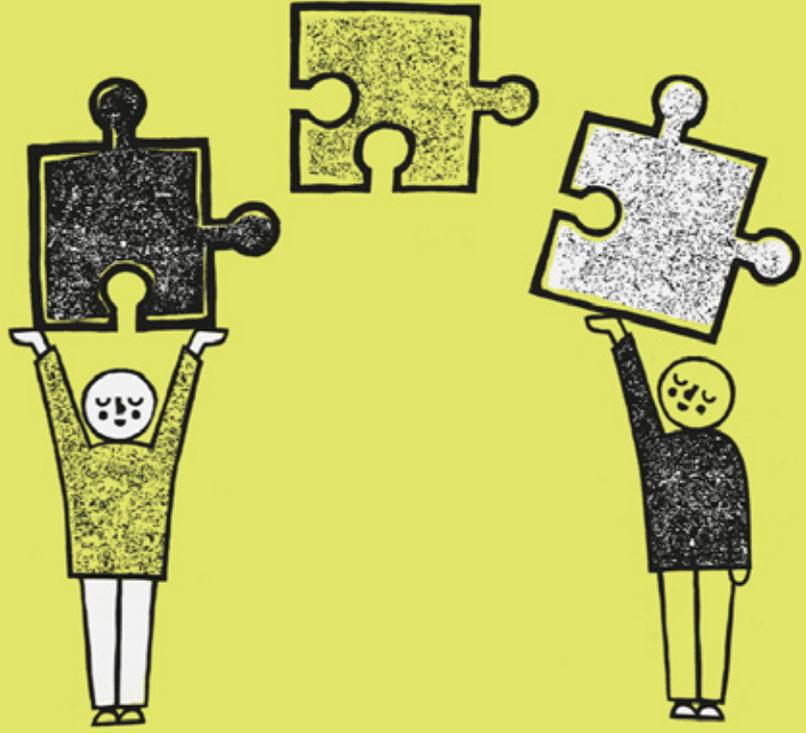
They can see there has to be a better and much fairer way of meeting people's needs. A better way of working together, overcoming decades of racial inequality and social injustice. A better way of living on this beautiful planet of ours, ensuring enough space for nature to heal, and for all other species to thrive. A better way, in short, for all of us to start thinking of ourselves as Good Ancestors, however old or young we may be. In those terms, I guess it's only right that the final thought from the three of us is that the work of Rise Up is definitely not yet done.

#KeepRisingUp!

So what does that mean for YOU?!

How will you **reboot the future?**

CHAPTER 8: THE BIG SHIFTS 2020-2026 By Jay Kantor



**PROGRESS IN
REBOOTING OUR
FUTURE**



As I mentioned earlier, I'm on the same Environment and Politics course at the College – and my Tutor keeps telling me to 'look at the trends – don't just listen to the noise!' So that's what I've tried to do here – looking at ten Big Shifts going on over the last five years.'



HEALTH

Covid-19 took the NHS right to the brink, highlighting just how under-funded this precious part of our lives had been for years and years. A much bigger share of our investment in health today focusses on preventing us from getting ill in the first place, rather than sorting us out once we've got it ill! This is already making a big difference – to rates of obesity, diabetes, asthma, mental health, and so on. 'Eat Well, Stay Active, Keep in Touch' – I guess we got used to these little public health messages during the pandemic!



CLIMATE

We now know that we'd hardly begun to get to grips with the Climate Emergency back in 2020, with climate-induced disasters becoming both more frequent and more damaging, whilst governments the world over were hanging back, refusing to see it as an out-and-out Emergency. In just five years, we've gone from that horror story to a new International Treaty, with binding commitments to halve emissions of greenhouse gases over the next decade. That only happened because young people rose up (literally!) to force the politicians to do what otherwise they would not have done. At great cost to young people, not just through RiseUp in 2023, but having to keep up the campaigning pressure month after month.



THE ECONOMY

Pre-COVID, it all seemed so simple: all governments needed to do was to ensure more economic growth. Year on year, every year, just as we'd done for decades. But the costs of generating growth in that way were mounting all the time – to the environment, to the climate, to our health, to chronic levels of injustice and racial inequality. COVID-19 forced us all to think again: if the pursuit of growth was destroying what really matters in our lives, surely we can find a different way not just of meeting people's needs more fairly, but ensuring a higher quality of life and increased wellbeing for everyone? That's what the 2024 General Election was all about, focussed on a new 'social contract' between citizens and the government. This is what all the big political debates are about today.



COMPASSIONATE VALUES

The pandemic taught us a lot about just how much we'd lost in terms of caring for each other. Since the 1980s, success had become more about 'me', not about 'we'. About consuming and competing, rather than about sharing, serving and cooperating. The life-sustaining work of millions of essential workers, volunteers and carers went largely unrecognised, whilst millions more lived in

loneliness or just put up with chronic mental health issues. That's now changing, but still far too slowly. Putting compassion at the heart of education today, bringing to life that old wisdom of 'do unto others what you would have done to you', is a critical part of our post-COVID world.



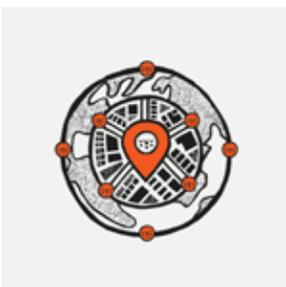
NATURE

The realisation that COVID-19 (and other lethal viruses) can be attributed directly to our destruction of the natural world was a shocking wake-up call. These days, we're no longer prepared to trade off the environment for a bit more economic growth, a few more houses in the wrong places, a few minutes saved on journey times through a new road. Putting Nature first, in our towns and cities as well as in rural areas, not least for our own health and wellbeing, is the priority for planners today. And the fact that looking after our forests, soils, wetlands, reefs and oceans just happens to be a brilliant way of dealing with the Climate Emergency has transformed government policy. Tens of billions of dollars are now being invested in healing all the environmental damage we've so carelessly caused over previous decades.



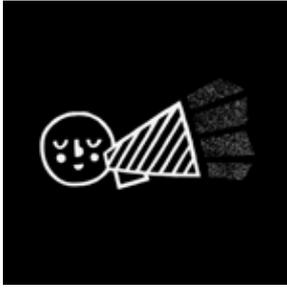
FOOD AND FARMING

Sadly, the way we produce and consume our food is still one of the greatest engines of environmental destruction in the modern world – and one of the greatest threats to human health! We've known it for years: too much meat, too much processed food, too much sugar, salt and fat, and far, far too much food wasted. But our politicians seemed powerless to act against the huge multinational companies that pretty much ran the global food economy. Happily, the shape of a very different post-COVID food system gets clearer by the day: healthier, more nutritious, more local, more plant-based, and much more caring about the natural world and the welfare of all farm animals. 'Regenerative food and farming' may be a bit of a mouthful, but that's what it's all about.



COMMUNITY

COVID-19 forced us all to think much more about the places where we live, the community of people, networks and interests that help make our lives work. We've evolved as communal creatures, dependent on each other, not as isolated individuals working away to promote our own narrow self-interest. 'What can we do for our community?' is now right up there in the way we organise things, helping to create the conditions in which everyone can thrive, including the most vulnerable and isolated. It's not easy. Not everyone gets it. And we're up against a legacy of decades of intolerance and deep inequalities. But this challenge has also galvanised a lot of young people – Parish Councils all over the country hardly know what's hit them!



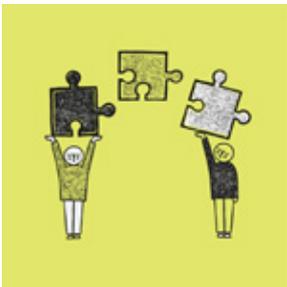
DEMOCRACY

Democracy in the UK was not in good shape when the pandemic hit. Hugely over-centralised, out of touch, weakened by decades of privatising more and more of what was once delivered by the public sector, with local government starved of funds, and very little trust between politicians and citizens. The Committee of Inquiry looking into why the UK did so much worse in managing COVID-19 than other European countries highlighted this 'chronic democratic deficit'. It's still slow, but things are now beginning to move: more powers (and money) devolved to city mayors, new funding for local government (with a chance for citizens to help prioritise the use of that money), more Citizens' Assemblies.



SOCIAL JUSTICE

It's still a bit of a mystery why we've put up with such startling inequality in our society for quite so long – in terms of child poverty, health inequalities, income divides, wretchedly poor quality housing, deep racial inequality, unequal educational attainment, and so on. Again, COVID-19 shone a very harsh light on all of that, making it impossible for politicians to go back to any kind of austerity politics. That shifted the whole debate about taxation: 'fair taxes' rather than 'low taxes' is where it's at today. Voters' readiness to see 2p on Income Tax to pay for a fair Social Care system is an indication of just how far things have shifted.



INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

That little phrase 'no-one's safe until we're all safe', in the context of COVID-19, forced us all to think differently about international cooperation – though it still took until mid-2022 to get everybody vaccinated. So much of this new understanding can be seen in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, with more progress made in delivering those Goals in the last year than in the preceding ten years. The UN itself is working so much better now than it was back in 2020. For instance, the World Health Organization has been properly funded to put together a long-term Pandemic Preparedness Strategy, and the United Nations Environment Program has seen its budget tripled to address today's ecological and biodiversity emergencies.