

Good morning.

The paper before you is both excellent and comprehensive. It is eloquent testimony to the exceptional quality of the officer team we are blessed with at B&NES, and is a fine start point for the Climate and Nature Strategy Update process which lies ahead.

Since – and even before – B&NES declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 (and I note Cllrs Jackson and Walker as veterans of that historic vote), we have been recognised as a pioneer amongst Local Authorities in the way we have addressed the Climate and Ecological crises that beset us. Now there is a chance to take that leadership to a whole new and exciting level.

Whatever you may be tempted to think about some fellow Cllrs in the dark watches of the night, my personal experience is that all – well, almost all – are good people who enter politics with a genuine passion to improve the lives of those they represent. Sometimes, though, long hours of endeavour may lead to a sense of frustration, a sense that nothing is happening, or, if it is, progress is glacially slow. It can be hard to see the improvements.

And since 2019, the context within which your climate and nature work unfolds has got progressively more fraught. Almost all the dials are moving faster than the experts predicted even seven years ago. Only on Monday, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated that every key

climate indicator is flashing red and that Planet Earth is being pushed beyond its limits.

So, the challenge you face is stark, but equally broad is the scale of the opportunity open to you. With ambition and with courage, there is so much you can achieve.

The paper argues compellingly for a move from cruder quantitative KPIs (300Mw, 68,000 homes, etc) to harder but more valuable qualitative ones, so that you have an opportunity to drive forward social justice and confront the toxic inequality which is proving so corrosive to our communities and our faltering democracy.

You have the chance to push not just rapid take-up of renewable energy, but to promote it being

community-owned, re-weaving the social fabric of the areas where it is sited.

You could follow Oxford County Council's Principle of Future Generations, so that the interests of future generations are considered in all council decision-making – supported by a Future Generations Member Champion and inclusion in a Cabinet Portfolio.

Could we not copy Henley's Green Futures Awards, the UK's first schools award to embed climate resilience at its heart?

So, Councillors, now is surely a time for brave and creative thinking. I urge you to let your ambition fly free. The 2016 COP Paris Agreement spoke of

countries exercising their 'highest possible ambition', and you surely should too.

You will, of course, be confronted by the merchants of doubt, of division and of disinformation – whether emanating from the White House, from Reform UK or from (from a small vocal minority in) Batheaston. You will need determination, but let your courage be unbridled.

If you do so, you will not only improve the lives of many. You will preserve and potentially save them. The hopes and the prospects of our children, our grandchildren and those who come after us rest on your shoulders. We rely on you.

Thank you.

