

Less hot air, more action

I am an earth scientist who, in the early seventies, was deeply concerned about the prospect of global warming, has since witnessed the thesis become a reality, and accepts that climate change will get worse unless checked.

I live in the UK, which contributes between 1% and 2% to global greenhouse gas emissions, but can be driven to distraction believing that, provided we play our part, things will get better. At the same time, the top five emission contributors – China, USA, India, Russia and Japan – who account for nearly 60% of the world's greenhouse gases, collectively, get worse faster than we can get better.

Does that mean we give up and don't try? No. It means doing the right thing, leading by example and influencing others. But, if our political leaders can't even unite on something as relatively parochial as Brexit, how on earth are we ever going to deal with climate change?

We shouldn't need any more emotive documentaries, big green speeches, select committee reports, gesturing photo opportunities or celebrity hypocrisy. Showing you know there is a problem is not enough. We have known this has been coming for decades. If it has taken us 30 years just to hear the penny drop, what chance is there that we will meet any of the carbon reduction targets whether 2025, 2030 or even 2050?

We are past the analysis. The priority is mitigation, adaptation and delivering sustainable solutions, just as the UN's Brundtland report 'Our Common Future' concluded as far back as 1987. The imperative is now all the greater, however, as we have wasted too much time on politics and too little responding to sound science.

Our industry has to play its part by delivering sustainable solutions. Mineral resources provide essential materials that are fundamental to our built environment and quality of life. It may sound appealing to stop building homes, schools, hospitals, transport infrastructure and power stations, but it is simply not an option. Adapting to future living

will demand as much – if not more – natural resource, not less. There is an indelible and inevitable environmental footprint that 'being civilised' carries that can't be wished away and should not be exported out of sight and out of mind. The need is real, the demand will occur from the customer and not the industry. Supply cannot be assumed, so how best to meet the demand sustainably?

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Unlike some competing materials, mineral products are locally-sourced with a low-carbon whole-life cost. These must be key factors in assessing the total environmental impact of materials in future. Does it really make any sense to deforest distant countries to ship products across the globe to meet demand for combustible, quick-fix prefab housing whilst seeking to afforest the UK? Are we measuring the true environmental costs on a comparable basis?

In the UK our industry is highly regulated and is known the world over for working to high operational and environmental standards. Through the restoration of quarries we achieve a biodiversity dividend, a 'net gain'. We have planted over 1.5 million trees in the past 10 years, created 9,000 hectares of priority



VIEWPOINT by MPA Chief Executive
Nigel Jackson

habitat with as much again in the pipeline. As subsidised agriculture threatens biodiversity, restored quarries become 'eco-oases' providing sanctuary for wildlife.

We recognise we need to be sustainable, and few industries have a track record as compelling as UK mineral products companies. We also pay a raft of environmental taxes on extraction, emissions and logistics to reflect and reduce our impacts. How many other sectors can say the same? And how many who supply the UK from overseas? From a supply-side economic perspective, one might justifiably ask 'why are we consistently singled out and penalised?'

The fact is that without our products we become less civil, less secure, less likely to lead and influence others for all our benefit. In the UK we carefully plan, we monitor, we measure, and we manage. This is an environmental and behavioural strength – let's recognise it and use it for the competitive advantage of UK plc. One of our greatest assets is our knowledge and expertise.

There is a need to share better evidence, create a more honest reflection, and accelerate meaningful mitigation and adaptation to future living. Government must create the right environment to incentivise transformation and innovation – it is more likely that an enterprise economy will discover and deliver the game-changers than regulation and taxation alone.

Whilst the era of action is 30 years overdue, with an informed sense of urgency we can still move in a positive direction. The mineral products sector continues to rise to the challenge but it is getting harder to do so when other more environmentally damaging and competing sectors – that are neither taxed nor regulated to the same extent – are favoured by shallow analysis and policy bias. If we are all to contribute to 'our common future', there needs to be parity of regulatory and policy treatment across the entire economy.