

Marginal Gains

A PolSoc publication

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COP out?



COP26 at Solihull

By Alex Horne

The end of COP26 just over a week ago produced an outcome perhaps foreshadowed by our own intraschool mock COP26 summit just a few weeks before. The reluctance of state leaders to commit to pledges consistent with the COP21 Paris Agreement on limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, set a dark precedent for future climate action.

Rod Oram, a New Zealand journalist who was soon to attend Glasgow's COP26, kindly hosted our mock conference. He began by outlining the aims for our own mock conference: to reach an agreement on a 50% reduction in global emissions by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050 in order to keep the rise in global temperature under 1.5C.

On that note, the 13 attending states deliberated between themselves to identify who they could consider allies or foes. Youth delegates and NGO representatives united in a bid to push world leaders closer to real climate action. Likewise, fossil fuel producers discussed with heavily coal reliant countries, such as China and Russia, how they could delay economic losses to their sectors.

What followed were a series of keynote speeches. Sweden's Greta Thunberg bitterly criticised almost every country for failing to promise carbon neutrality by 2030. Interestingly, it was the Alliance of Small Island States who drew most of the sympathy, who's 39 members have contributed less than 1% to the world's greenhouse gas emissions yet are particularly vulnerable to climate change induced sea level rise and coastal erosion. The EU attempted to use their clean tech provisions as a bargaining chip to



encourage China and other reluctant countries to join the pledge for carbon neutrality by 2030. However, China was adamant that 100% carbon neutrality was simply not feasible before 2060; their reluctance to concede some economic growth proving a difficult obstacle to overcome. There was some success in the granting of solar panels to Nigeria in exchange for a reduction in oil supply, but ultimately the final vote on the resolution was impeded by the uncompromising approach certain countries adopted.

It is fundamentally impossible to keep global temperature rise under 1.5C without a cohesive climate strategy. The failure to agree upon a clear strategy for limiting our current exponential growth in emissions, at both Glasgow and Solihull School's COP26, pitches the future of our climate into further uncertainty. It is looking increasingly likely that we will soon be no longer discussing how to prevent the impacts of global warming, but instead how to deal with them.



From Paris to COP26

By Lauren Jones-Brown

The Paris agreement was made in December 2015 at the COP21 conference where 195 countries made the target to keep the average global temperature below 2°C or as close to 1.5°C as possible. The Paris agreement was the first ever legally binding global climate change agreement. However, six years later approaching the COP26 conference the planet was on track for a dangerous 2.7°C global temperature suggesting that the Paris agreement has had little impact.

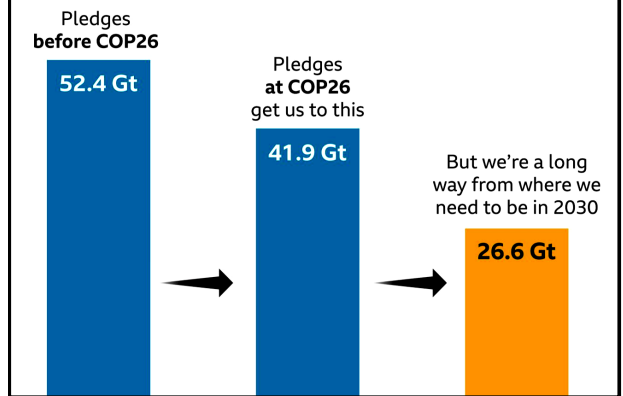
However, during COP26 there were signs of significant change and a new estimate was made that the global temperature was on track for 1.8-2.4°C. The Paris agreement was vital for COP26 as it underpinned all the talks in Glasgow: it required that every five years all parties involved in the agreement should come forward with more ambitious national climate goals, making COP26 the most

important and impactful climate meeting since COP21.

It is easy to criticise the agreements reached at Glasgow, but there were some promising developments such as the agreement to accelerate efforts to phase out coal power, end inefficient fossil fuel subsidies and also to recognise the need for support towards a just transition for the first time. As well as this all the technical negotiations on the Paris agreement rulebook were completed, which fixed the transparency and reporting requirements for all parties involved in the agreement to track their progress against their emission reduction target. The rule book also contains Article 6 mechanisms, which set out the functioning of international carbon markets to support further reduction in global cooperation on emissions.

Big emissions cuts still needed to limit warming to 1.5C

Projected greenhouse gas emissions in 2030, gigatonnes



At the end of this conference many different groups agreed to revisit their commitments, if necessary, by the end of 2022 to make sure there is a clearer path to stay on track for 1.5°C global temperature, and therefore maintain the upper end of ambition for the Paris agreement. So, COP26 effectively worked towards helping and keeping the agreements made in the Paris agreement. Hopefully, the adjustments and amendments made to the agreement will get us to a 1.5°C global temperature.



The hottest topic this week

By Tom Burnett

Whilst the COP26 convention was being held in Scotland, North America was experiencing one of the worst wildfire seasons in over two decades. Many previous seasons had done little to no damage in the forests, but due to climate change and the rising global temperatures the past two years have been devastating. Even with a dedicated wildfire response unit and planning, this year has demonstrated the weakness in both American and Canadian defences. Multiple wildfires spread across the borders of both of the countries and burned some towns to the ground.



Some of the wildfires from these countries produced so much smoke that it has travelled across the Atlantic Ocean and made its way as far as Spain and Portugal. These wildfires have been raging across the US with over 20,000 firefighters battling to put out at least 100 of the biggest wildfires in the west of the country. Some of these fires have exceeded 50,000 acres of forest and significantly impacted the lives of the people and the environment.

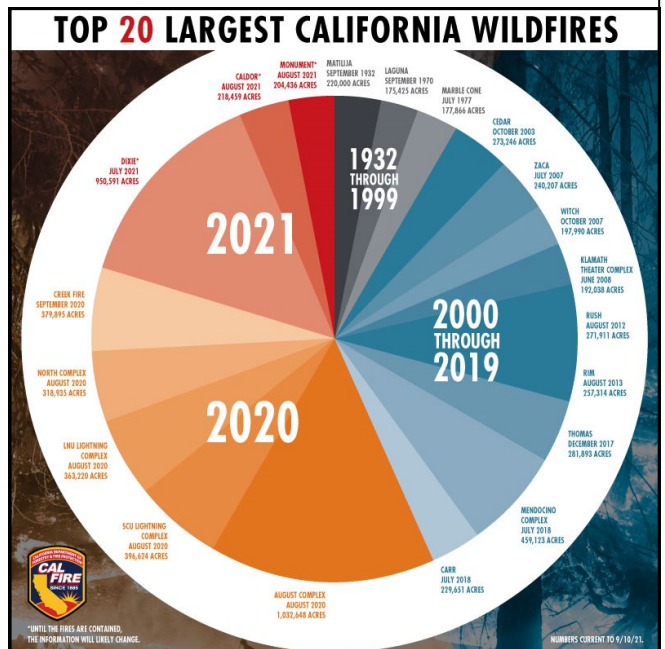
There were more than 50,000 wildfires being reported across the US as of the 5th of November, and there are current active fires in Alaska and Arizona as well as California and many more states.

In California and North America forests contain Giant Redwoods and Sequoias - these trees store 400-600 tonnes of co2 per hectare, live for over 3000 years produce on average 260 pounds of oxygen each year. Therefore, these forests are massive stores of carbon and also part of the 'lungs of the earth'. These

wild fires that are devastating the land normally wouldn't be a problem for these trees due to their great thickness but due to rising temperatures the fires have been much worse and have broken through to the heart of the trees and killed many of them. The amount of CO2 being released back into the atmosphere from these dying trees has been devastating.

But what has been happening in the COP26 whilst this has been happening? Has it been a success? There have been some achievements - in the summit's first major deal more than 100 leaders promised to end and reverse deforestation by 2030. COP has the aim of keeping global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees and reducing emissions nearer to net zero over the next decade. If this happens the wildfires all over the world

will likely to decrease in severity and services will be able to plan and respond to them. This is why we need to focus on Climate Change. It affects our lives in nearly every aspect if we want to continue to live in a safe environment.



Nigeria's Climate Crisis



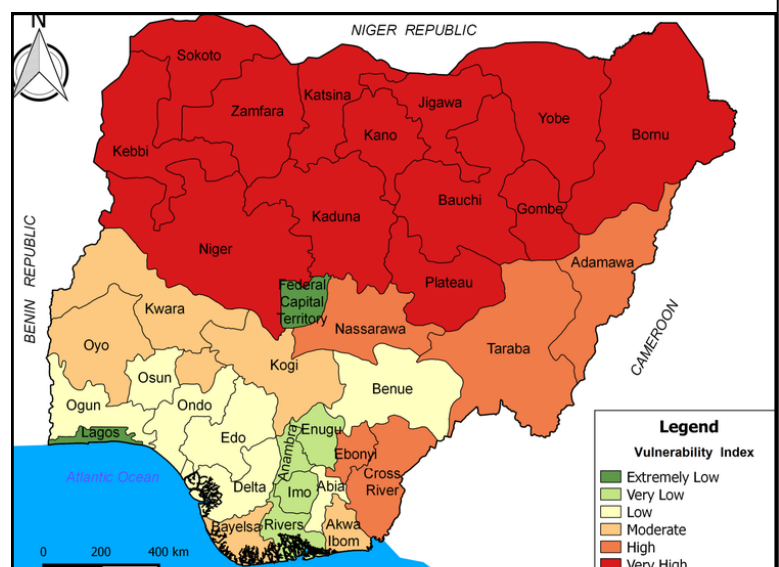
By Ciara Savage

Nigeria, with the largest economy and population in Africa is also the 17th biggest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. Nigeria's economy is dependent on oil and gas, and petroleum exports alone account for 86% of the country's total export revenue. But Nigeria's climate is also dramatically changing, with increases in temperature leading to extreme heat, affecting those without air conditioning and threatening precipitation levels in the agriculture largely fed by rainwater. Impacts include flooding, drought, land degradation, extreme weather events and loss of biodiversity. Lake Chad and other lakes in Nigeria are drying up and at risk of disappearing. For Nigerian environmental activists, the country is already experiencing the effects of the climate change crisis, and 61% of the population there consider climate change as a 'very serious problem'.

Despite this, little has been done to tackle the issue. Although President Buhari signed the Paris Agreement in 2015 where he pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2030 (45% with international support), its emissions have actually increased by 16% since that agreement was signed. Moreover, in 2017 the government said it would ramp up solar energy production, yet has not since made much progress on developing this technology. More recently, the country vowed to reach net-zero by 2060 at COP26, and President Buhari requested international partners to finance projects to meet this target.

Nevertheless, whilst the

country has an economy which almost entirely depends on oil and gas exports, it is difficult to envisage how it will transition to net-zero at all. Nigeria provides a perfect example of a developing country which simply does not have the funds to invest in green tech or risk leaving oil and gas behind, therefore endangering the climate pledges of all other COP26 countries.



New Delhi's pollution problem

By Jennifer Storey

Air pollution is a problem affecting millions around the world, impacting our physical health; damaging cities and whole countries; causing a fog to loom over us all. If we don't make a change to reduce this problem our picturesque landscapes will be obstructed. The Indian Supreme Court is calling for a lockdown in the capital city, New Delhi, due to the emerging health emergency caused by the polluted atmosphere, currently four times the safe limit.

We are all familiar with the term 'lockdown' since over the past few years we have been significantly restricted due to the coronavirus pandemic, but this new context to a lockdown may be a more familiar occurrence in the future. At a hearing on Monday, justices ordered a ban on all nonessential travel on all the roads in the capital region. In addition to this offices were closed causing tens of millions of people to return to working from home. Even schools in the city have been closed after only just being opened again as a result of the pandemic. This overall halt to life is creating a detrimental impact on India's growing economy.

The toxic smog coating much of the north of India is a result of industrial and vehicular emissions. In the past farmers have also been blamed for this problem, although it has now been discovered that the burning of stubble after harvest amounts to only 10% of the emissions in the country. However, despite the action taken in New Delhi, it is clear that it will have little effect unless the same action is taken in the neighbouring cities.

But what change to the crisis of air pollution has COP26 made? The Zero Emission Vehicles Transition Council is the world's first political forum



through which ministers and high flying figures in the automotive markets gather together to discuss how to transition the world to zero emissions. Since COP26 this group has been working on ways to make this possible, such as: ensuring fair consumer access to zero emission vehicles; making sure that Electric Vehicle battery supply chains are sustainable and furthering our innovation to make the transition

quicker and easier.

But surely this is not enough. Road transport accounts for only 10% of all the global greenhouse gas emissions, so why is there such a heavy focus on this and no other methods of polluting our air. If we collectively do not come together to assess ways to change this, we will return to the regime of uncertain lockdowns.



Should 16 year olds have the vote?

As part of their course for the Middle School Diploma three LV pupils consider the arguments for lowering the voting age.

Caspar Perry

34% of people think they should. But 45% of people don't. The other 21% don't really mind. So, looking at that 34 percent, why do they think that? The overriding argument seems to be that at 16, you're an adult; you can get married and leave home, you can leave formal education. So you should be able to vote for a political leader, right? It gives younger people more reason to learn about politics – a subject of which there is no compulsory formal teaching in school.

'16-year-olds are just as wise and politically aware as 18-year olds' one of those wishing for change argues. 16-year-olds are at the heart of the things we vote for. They are experiencing education, school and university first-hand, and will be there to see change in our country, so if anyone should get a say in the future it should them. The people who will live the future the voters make.

To conclude, whilst there will always be a divide when topics like this are being discussed, I feel the voting age should be lowered because why shouldn't we be able to vote on decisions that affect the rest of our lives?

Shaya Moeini

I don't think the voting age should be lowered. There is so much responsibility in voting and educating yourself around political viewpoints that I feel is an unnecessary amount of stress for young people. Even though it could potentially get young voices heard, it is more likely that

parents or friend groups would influence the decision. Hasn't there ever been a time that you've done or said something because a friend/parent pressured you into it even if you didn't want to? The answer is probably yes and, in this way, young voices won't actually be heard, they would just be overshadowed by other viewpoints.

As I said earlier it is a lot of responsibility. Children can't drive, choose to buy alcohol, own credit cards, join the army or go out on their own so how could you justify giving them the vote? They will have had next to no practice making impactful life decisions and most wouldn't be engaged enough or have time enough to look into political standings before voting anyway. Do you really want more people who know nothing about politics voting for no apparent reason?

Younger children are also not fully developed in their minds and politics can come with a lot of hate, especially on social media. It's bad enough for an adult to experience something like that, but would you want your child to be receiving death threats for posting about their views online? It would be an unnecessary awful experience and a lot of naïve young people wanting to share their political views on social media will be severely affected by it. Therefore, for these reasons, I think that the voting age should not be lowered.

Chanelle Gidda

First of all why should we vote? Voting is very important as it allows citizens to participate

in the democratic process. We vote for leaders and people to represent them. So why shouldn't people from the age of 16 be allowed to vote? There are many reasons to lower the voting age. One reason is because the results of voting can affect their lives more than it would for adults. Take Brexit for an example. It is said that over 65s were more than twice as likely to vote to leave than people under 25. As they are so old, they won't be here for long so it wouldn't affect them as much. Whereas younger people would suffer from less employment, decline in personal rights and more. Don't you think if it affects us young people so much, we should get to vote?

People that are against lowering the voting age may have the argument that 16-year-olds aren't mature enough to make these political decisions. However, at this age people are allowed to marry, pay taxes and leave home. Young people have adult responsibilities but are refused the right to vote. How is this fair?

To conclude, I think that we should lower the voting age to 16 because the decisions the society makes could have a huge impact on our future lives. Therefore, we should get a say.



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What is Solihull doing?

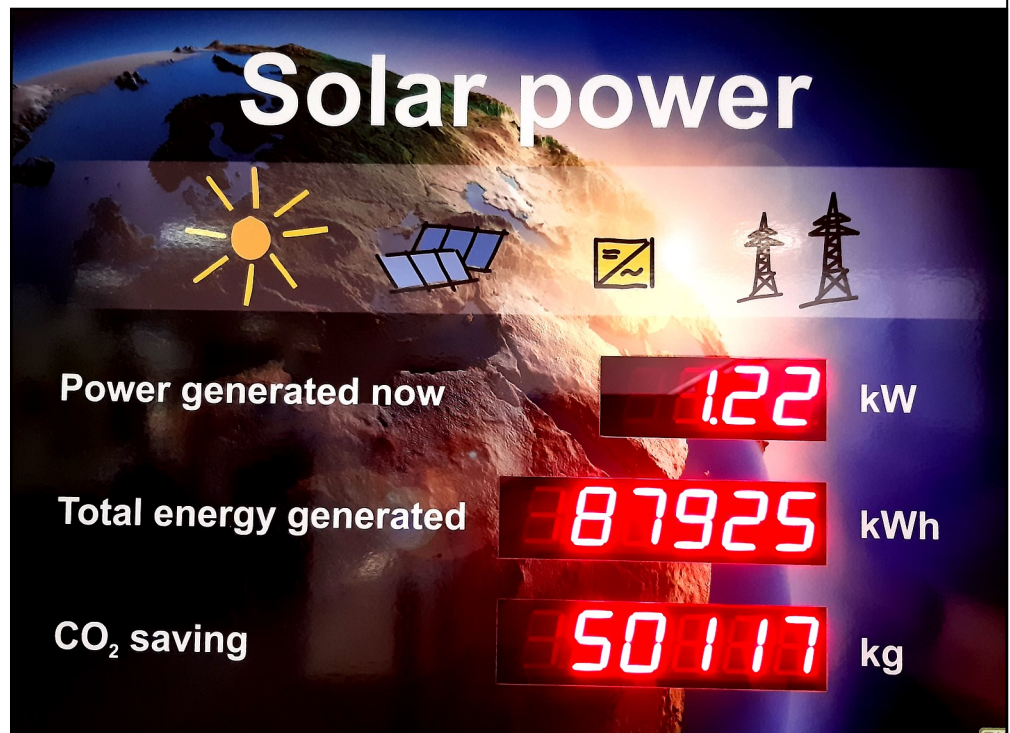
By Amy Wood

Whilst we consider the global priorities of the climate crisis during the COP26 conference, it is important to look at how we can work towards net zero closer to home. At Solihull School, we have employed many strategies to become a greener community and I spoke to the Bursar, Mr Bate, to discuss these projects.

Some of the major projects that have been undertaken in the past 5 years include the installation of solar panels on the Cooper Building and George Hill Building roofs, helping us generate our own renewable energy. While a brilliant environmental step forward, it's a very costly endeavour, especially with the reduction in government subsidies for producing your own energy.

A further major project has been the roll out of LED lights, starting with the Warwick Road Campus and continuing to the Saint Martins Campus. The majority of our lighting systems are now LED and Mr Bate is aiming to have completed the full roll out in the near future. LED bulbs can be up to 80% more efficient than conventional bulbs and consume less power per unit of light emitted. This reduces greenhouse emissions from power plants. We have further reduced our reliance on power plants by having all the electricity and gas that we purchase across both campuses be from renewable sources. These big projects are creating substantial change on both campuses to reduce our carbon footprint.

Our major projects are working effectively but to create real and long-standing change, we need a shift in attitude and practices from the whole



Panel in the George Hill building showing the energy generated by the school's solar panels

community. Simple one-second tasks like turning the lights off add up to a big impact. Banning single use plastic bottles at the school has had an impact, as have the battery recycling collection points and the charity recycling unit on the Warwick Road Chapel Car Park, but we can all do more to make a difference. Mr Bate is frustrated by the amount of food wastage in the refectory, and being more aware of taking only what we will eat will result in less wastage. The new kitchen facility at the Warwick Road campus does now allow us to de-hydrate much of the waste and send some of it for re-use but less wastage in the first place would make a difference.

In addition, the school community does not always use the resources provided effectively. The rubbish bins on the Warwick Road campus have separate sections for general

waste and mixed recycling but we see very poor usage of them. The recycling boxes in all the classrooms on both campuses can be used for mixed recyclables (clear plastics, cardboard etc) as well as paper but they often aren't! Finally, Mr Bate encouraged everyone to approach meat-free days (breakfast, tuck shop and lunches), which are to become a regular feature of the menu cycle, with an open mind and see this as an opportunity to try new eating habits rather than something to grumble about!

As we face one of the biggest challenges of our generation we need to increase our awareness, keeping the environment at the forefront of our minds while on campus and changing our behaviour both on and off campus accordingly: there is always more we can do!