

COMMENT

There is no vaccine for climate change

The way in which we consume energy in the coming years needs revising in the wake of the pandemic

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Before Covid-19 and consignment to the home office, my daily routine often involved gaping at the number of lights on in empty office blocks in Canary Wharf as I left work of an evening.

Even by day it's not uncommon to see row after row of windows framing unoccupied desks. If the rise of agile working meant these offices were operating below capacity to begin with, what will they be like post Covid-19?

Are we to simply carry on using the same level of energy required to service offices and factories filled with half the people?

The way in which we consume energy going forward, and how quickly we will be able to reduce our demand for it, is ready for an abrupt rethink. As we start to look ahead to

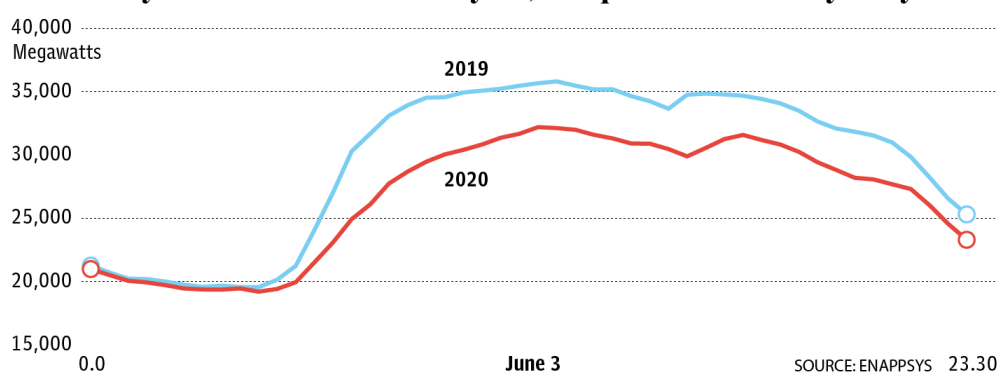
enthusiasts turned face shield manufacturers demonstrates the momentous impact that the greater willingness for collective action can have – not just between governments, but between businesses, communities and individuals.

In this sense, the crisis has shown us what we can achieve.

Imagine if we applied this approach to the next, and greater, crisis – climate change. While Covid-19 has so far tragically cost well over 400,000 lives worldwide, the risk to humanity posed by changes in the climate are dramatically higher. The WHO already put the figure at 150,000 deaths annually.

Last week a leading cardiologist, in the middle of this global pandemic, still called climate change our greatest health challenge. Rising temperatures, and the fires and flooding that resort from irreversible changes to our habitat, threaten the health and wellbeing of

Electricity demand on June 3 this year, compared to same day last year



life beyond lockdown, the corporate world is taking a long, hard look at itself and assessing whether businesses still stand up in a post Covid-19 world.

In most cases, at least in the short term, the answer to this question will be no. Whilst many are no stranger to reinvention, the unprecedented nature and scale of this crisis will require unprecedented levels of change.

Likewise, this pandemic has highlighted not only the scale of cooperation and coordination required to effectively tackle a crisis to which national borders have no bearing, but also shown us that we are capable of rising to this challenge.

The sheer speed in which the UK manufacturing industry responded to the government's call to arms for ventilators, and the countless businesses and home 3D printer

many more than will die of Covid-19 infection.

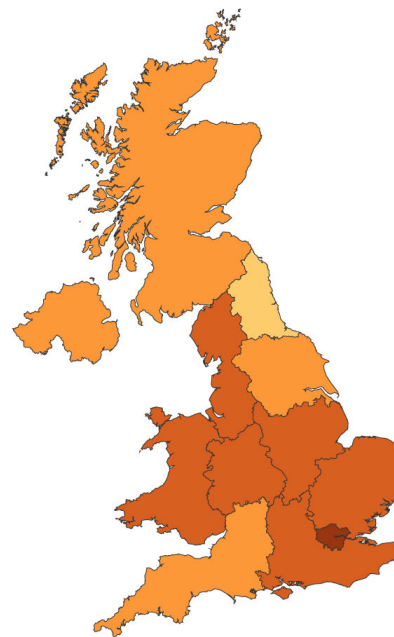
The economic risks are also much greater. One unforeseen but welcome side effect of the lockdown is the glimpse of green it has afforded, with lower carbon emissions significantly reducing pollution levels, improving air quality, and slowing the pace of global warming.

However, the long-term goal posts on climate change remain unchanged. As we rebuild, we must harness the learnings from Covid-19, putting zero carbon at the heart of the economic recovery to ensure an even greater global crisis is avoided.

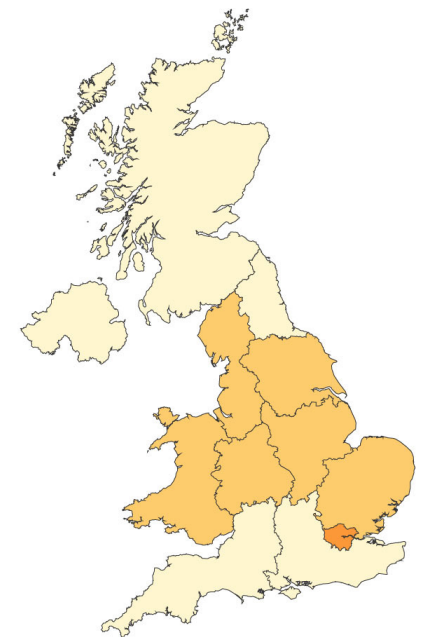
Technology and collaboration are key ingredients. With flexible energy supply, smart technology, and a willingness to drive change from corporates, councils and communities – everything is possible.

Air pollution in the UK has fallen compared with last year

Average NO₂: 10-14 15-19 20-24 25-29 >30
2019 - data from 25/03 to 07/04



2020 - data from 23/03 to 05/04



SOURCE: DEFRA

The green economy – Covid effect

503m–607m – fewer airline passengers predicted in first half of 2020 as a result of Covid-19

8pc – potential fall in global greenhouse gas emissions during 2020 as a result of Covid-19

7.49 – estimated number of jobs generated by \$1m spending in renewable sector

£800m – Amount pledged by Conservatives' March budget towards building two carbon-capture and storage facilities in the UK by 2030

16pc – of the total public stimulus spent on "green recovery" programmes after the 2008/9 financial crash

The Government has an opportunity to lead by example when we – eventually – host COP26. Ensuring a stable policy environment and backing on-shore wind and solar will give confidence to the private sector to make long-term investments in renewables.

Enhancing existing incentives would encourage rapid commercialisation and scaling of solutions such as green hydrogen, and smart local energy systems – all of which will help further green our energy supply.

In the weeks following lockdown, the UK's carbon emissions dropped by a staggering 31pc. Just under a third of emissions come from buildings. It shouldn't be inevitable these emissions go back to previous levels when the economic remobilises.

The Government should make energy management a climate commitment, met with a programme of retrofitting offices, public buildings and local authority homes to standards that significantly improve efficiency.

This would help the climate, provide jobs and deliver much needed savings on running costs.

There is no reason for all those lights in Canary Wharf, or other urban centres, to stay on all night. I am proud of how our business has responded to the challenges of Covid-19, such as powering and delivering critical services in healthcare and stepping up for our people and their communities.

But I will be much prouder if we can capture the things we have learnt during this crisis and take them forward in helping ourselves and our customers – SMEs, large corporates, local authorities – accelerate their net zero ambitions.

There will be no vaccine for climate change, so we must be much more effective in the containment phase. The health crisis has shown us a glimpse of what is possible when we come together to defeat a common threat.

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