

# Chester World Development Forum

## Minutes of Forum Meeting held on Thursday 13 July 2023, 7pm at The Unity Centre



Present: Sean Anglish, Sue Bownas, Jean Cornes, Lindsay Lloyd-Cussons, Kathryn Gornall, Catherine Green, Terry Green (Chair), Gill Miller, Andrew Needham, Bernard Payne, Ron Reid, Stuart Shuttleworth, Peter Speirs, John Tacon and Tony Walsh, plus John Freeman (via Zoom)

Apologies: Ann McCarthy, Linda Shuttleworth, Heather Swainston, Martin Evans

Invited guests: Samantha Dixon, MP, and Dylan Topham (Constituency Support Officer)

### Presentation by Sam Dixon, MP for Chester

Sam (SD) noted her longstanding links with CWDF as former MP Christine Russell's aide. She commended Chester as being a very caring city at the forefront of actions such as the UK's first Fairtrade city, supporting Sustainable Palm Oil, City of Sanctuary, etc in which Cestrians push for change. SD's motivation is to make the world a better place. She is now Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) to Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves.



SD highlighted several challenges:

1. Climate Change.
  - The current 'Cerebus' anticyclone, with its 40+°C temperatures in parts of southern Europe, indicates the likely future impacts on our lives. As prospective Chancellor, Rachel Reeves is robust on Labour commitments in response to climate change, such as the Green Prosperity Fund, and the £28 billion support for emerging green technologies which will gradually increase over time. Labour will not solely focus on Net Zero in the UK, but recognises the need for a global response.
  - Labour will aim to return the international development budget to 0.7% of GDP in a fiscally prudent way. The intention is to establish a new development model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century to ensure that aid is invested effectively. All UKAID decisions need to be made in the context of climate change; Labour intends to be a *global* party.
  - Labour is aiming for a clean power alliance – 100% clean power production by 2030. It will promote climate action as the fourth pillar at the UN, and encourage coordination and cooperation between poor, middle income and rich nations.
2. Migration.
  - Climate change fuels conflicts and migration when people do not feel safe, and is a major force causing people to be displaced within their own countries. [UN figures show this is a very significant proportion of overall global migration.] SD can see the failures at the Home Office, where long delays in making decisions on asylum applications have adverse impacts on asylum seekers' mental health.
  - SD is proud of the high quality of the Chester local government and community responses to resettling refugee families from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

On being an MP: SD was already familiar with Parliament (and the shabby offices). She received a warm welcome from MPs in all parties. Several Labour colleagues had campaigned on her behalf in Chester to help get her elected. She feels that many Conservative MPs look tired, as if they have run

out of steam, and several have told her they will be glad to leave Westminster. Brexit battles and the Covid pandemic have both taken a toll on MPs generally.

In response to questions from the floor:

1. Good news on Green policy, but serious concern over the time lag between policy and delivery. Essential to be fiscally prudent but the government must be in a position to make the considerable investments needed.
2. Labour wants to give a message of hope to young people regarding water, migration, and climate issues. It will focus on collective action rather than individualism. It must aim to find and build on areas of agreement rather than emphasising differences between groups and parties. Rachel Reeves and Ed Miliband have an inspirational agenda which recognises the need for a global approach, whereas the current government has an inward-looking style.
3. SD has joined the All Party Parliamentary Group on Zoos, one of over 600 groups on various topics. Some APPGs are highly obscure – Crustaceans – while some take a ‘grace and favour’ approach to lobbying. Several have Lords and Commoners as members. Membership can be a mixed blessing and potentially very time-consuming. There are also many Select Committees, Bill Committees, Policy Committees, etc.
4. SD accepted that the EU has established the carbon footprint for production of lithium ion batteries. Their very high footprint means that mass adoption of electric cars is somewhat questionable. The carbon footprint of AI is also huge, with a set of complex production chains involving global politics: where chips come from; the ethics of AI; production in unstable countries.
5. With regard to taxing the super-rich, Labour’s view is that those with the broadest shoulders should bear the largest load. SD could not understand how the UK has managed to have the highest tax burden *and* the highest debt of developed countries.
6. On housing: 25% of Chester’s housing stock was built before 1919 and designated ‘historic’. The challenge is how to make these homes sustainable. The resources to solve the problem are zero-rated but we need to apply that to labour too, to help make retrofitting affordable.
7. SD will confirm asap whether or not Labour will take DfID out of the FCDO. She noted that all departmental reorganisations come at some cost.
8. On Labour policy on the arms trade: it has a commitment to UK armed forces, and there is a strong link with Chester. Difficult balance to achieve regarding international trade in arms.
9. On relationships with the Civil Service: SD felt there is a need for clear direction and messaging to civil servants. There has been a movement of resources away from routine departmental work to focus on Brexit and the pandemic, so the Home Office is now under-resourced and this slows decision-making at lower levels, for example, on asylum claims.
10. Who would make a good Prime Minister? There are several talented people with valuable experience and vision, as well as those who are untested. Essentially the UK system is one of a cabinet with collective responsibility.

Questions were followed by a short presentation from Sue Bownas, requesting SD to support the *Transform Trade* campaign calling for a fashion watchdog to address persistent concerns about labour exploitation in the global fashion industry.

### **Business Meeting**

1. After paying room hire, there will be an effective balance of £388. Further expenditures this year will be £120 for room hire, around £60 hosting fee for our website, so there should be funds for a celebration after the final scheduled Forum meeting in November.
2. Terry noted that CWDF attracts no new members, and has ageing supporters, which makes it unlikely to continue in its current form into 2024. The Committee continues to consider how CWDF might continue.
3. Future meetings:
  - 19 September: Gill Miller on Dealing with Disease – whose responsibility is it?
  - 14 November: Final Meeting - Peter Speirs and Philip Austin – work for peace, including the efforts of Quaker-inspired groups. This meeting will conclude with a celebration of 30 Years of CWDF.

### **Other notices:**

4. A Jamie's Fund visit to Uganda is planned for September. This includes training at a staff conference and visits to local centres delivering mental health services.
5. The local Fairtrade group is pressing hard for space in Chester market before Christmas. Volunteers very welcome – see John Tacon or Heather Swainston.
6. Hydrogen gas project for domestic heating will not go ahead in Whitby because of strong local opposition – but could proceed in the other candidate area in Redcar.
7. CAFOD's *Seeds for All* campaign: Bernard gave a brief outline of this element of the larger initiative to "Fix the food system". Everyone present was invited to sign a 'giant letter' to the new Head of the World Bank to indicate their support for small farmers to retain their ability to use their own seeds and to trade seeds with other famers, helping to maintain biodiversity.