



Seminar
2024



One Crisis: A One Solution Approach





Introduction

Industry leaders, environmental supply chain experts, and infrastructure and built environment professionals gathered on 17 September 2024 to join forces, develop a plan and lead the way in tackling the ‘triple planetary crisis’. A term coined by the United Nations (UN), that refers to the three main interlinked issues that humanity currently faces: climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

Fragmented strategies have been ineffective and counterproductive for the natural environment. The crises are firmly interlinked, and to tackle them, we must do so by treating them as ‘One Crisis’. To do this we need a holistic approach to infrastructure development—one that draws upon cross-sector expertise and implements best practices to create systems that support both people and our planet. Together, we must anticipate the future and build for whole life value and climate resilience.

Throughout the event, it was agreed that communication is central to the success of any plan and strategy. Storytelling is key to tackling the crisis - championing best practice and project successes to move industry and people in the right direction and encourage a behavioural shift.

“As the impacts of multiple crises intensify, now is the time to get ahead of the curve and protect ourselves from emerging challenges,”

“By monitoring signals of change and using the foresight approach, the world can avoid repeating mistakes of the past and focus on solutions that can withstand future disruption.”

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen

(UN, July 2024 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/07/1152136>)



One Crisis

1.1 Burning platform

Our planet is at an environmental crossroads. Humanity must solve the climate and nature crises together or solve neither. It is, therefore, appropriate to address these issues as 'One Crisis', and not a series of unrelated environmental consequences.

We are calling for a one solution approach to the three interlinked crises currently facing humanity as described by the United Nations: climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. A unified solution is required to resolve environmental issues such as enhancing nature and biodiversity and protecting our communities from the increasingly severe impacts of climate change.

1.2 Summary of the discussion

The UN has 17 sustainable development goals, and one of our panellists opened to say that the 17th, "Partnerships for the Goals", was the most pertinent to the discussion. And our panel strongly agreed that the sustainably crises should be treated as one; however, there are barriers to breaking down the siloes. Furthermore, the crisis does not always seem immediate to everyone, including sometimes our clients, who seek greater tangibility.

An audience member commented "People can see the real benefit of flood mitigation projects and projects to restore wetlands and woodlands. Projects are much easier to implement if you convey the story well to people." The theme of storytelling came out strongly, with the panel noting the need to bring people along with us to recognise one crisis and the need to act. Quantitative data must be used to

back-up theories and reinforce stories. The data, would help clients see that action made business sense, reducing long-term costs and mitigating risks.

The panel discussed the importance of helping clients move beyond just compliance. Projects should approach the three crises in a manner that acts as a catalyst for positive outcomes rather than just mitigating impacts. One panellist noted that a shift could only be achieved if we overcome the issue of "green-hushing" and give clients and projects a safe space to explore and innovate. Furthermore, it was noted by another panellist that the issue of graduates leaving the industry for sectors with a greater perceived focus on sustainability must be addressed. On both issues, decision makers are moving faster but change also needs to gather pace.



Break down silo - work in partnership



Tell the story



Backed it up with data and tangible business imperative



Look beyond just compliance to catalysing positive outcomes

1.3 Our policy

In our ACE/EIC 'Sustainable Growth and Prosperity: A plan for the Next UK Government' we made the following asks which align to our discussion. We also note, since the publication of this plan, there has been good progress by the new Government to implement many of our asks across this report's three themes.

The Departments for Energy Security and Net Zero and Environment Farming and Rural Affairs must take a 'One Crisis' approach to climate and nature. Plans for nature and delivering net zero must be aligned. Government should ensure that planning and infrastructure decisions address nature, climate and health together, to ensure efficient delivery. Circular economy, chemical, air quality, water and soil strategies need to be proportionate and align with international best practice.

An industry skills action plan for net zero and nature recovery – Department for Business and Trade. The plan should include an assessment of when, where, and in which sectors there are skills gaps specific to net zero and environmental resilience. The plan should be accompanied by an industry roadmap of new skills standards, frameworks, and qualifications specific to the built and natural environment. Alongside the plan, Government should review the national curriculum to embed the teaching of engineering, and ensure a renewed focus on lifelong upskilling, and promoting opportunities in innovation and the built environment.

A value-based approach to procurement: Government must do more to drive best practice across all local and national government market opportunities, with a cultural shift in how contracts are scored and awarded increasing the importance of added social value. This should be supported through compliance with the Construction Playbook, reinforced through government support and best practice.

Circular Economy

2.1 Burning platform

Earth's resources are finite. Reducing the use of natural resources and reusing and recycling products means these precious materials are protected and we can limit habitat disruption and biodiversity loss. To minimise the use of materials and increase recycling and reusing of materials in circulation, we need a clear and coherent circular economy plan from Government.

The circular economy model offers a powerful tool to promote resource efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. By keeping resources in use for as long as possible, the circular

economy approach reduces the need for new resources, which in turn lowers emissions. This is achieved through various measures, such as product design for durability and longevity, reusing and repurposing materials, and implementing circular business models.

The benefits the circular economy delivers are driving the use of business models and service delivery approaches that promote sustainable resource use. This results in the transition to circular delivery models prioritising resource efficiency and sustainable consumption patterns.

2.2 Summary of the discussion

A passionate panel underlined that circular economy practices are not anti-business but to achieve adoption the narrative needs to shift. Reducing material use can reduce costs and is the most important of the three circular economy principles of eliminate, circulate and regenerate. It was noted that as much as 35% of materials can be reduced in construction through various techniques and technologies available today (the most important of which is design). In turn, this will reduce upfront carbon emissions from construction by 39%; therefore, this is crucial to engaging clients.

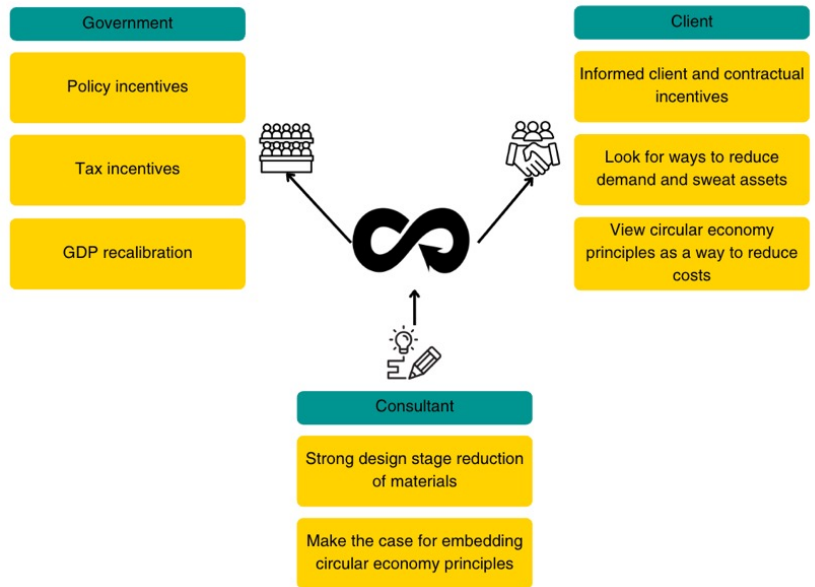
During the discussion, a panellist shared a case study where a client had integrated social value elements into a contract, to enable 'better value by design' and for circular economy principles to be incorporated without a bid being discounted.

Informed customers have a significant role in embedding social and carbon benefits into their procurement processes. A panellist also shared an example of working with a local authority in Manchester. A £1bn contract has been renewed largely due to it embedding a Renew Hub and valuing waste in a different way to create economic, environmental, and social value.

However, beyond contracts and design, the panel and audience recognised the need for a better tax structure where new builds are not fiscally favoured over refurbishments by the Treasury. Whilst on the subject of the Treasury, the panel criticised the over-reliance on GDP as a measure as it doesn't recognise the wider benefits of the circular economy which do not necessarily align with a narrow definition of growth, highlighting the need for change.

One panellist noted that degradation in the supply chain is already negatively impacting GDP and we must change narrative that we need to extract resources to grow. There was consensus that there was, in fact, economic opportunity to embed circular economy principles in our government departments and economy.

Ending the session on a positive note, the panel noted the enthusiasm of young people to embed circular economy principles in businesses and choose to work for companies making meaningful change. If we want to attract the best talent, we must look at our approach to sustainability.



2.3 Our policy

The Departments for Energy Security and Net Zero and Environment Farming and Rural Affairs must take a ‘One Crisis’ approach to climate and nature. Plans for nature and delivering net zero must be aligned. Government should ensure that planning and infrastructure decisions address nature, climate and health together, to ensure efficient delivery. Circular economy, chemical, air quality, water and soil strategies need to be proportionate and align with international best practice.

Following our discussion, we have taken the opportunity to expand our asks in ‘Sustainable Growth and Prosperity: A plan for the Next UK Government’ to reflect the huge importance the circular economy has for our members and the economy.

The Treasury should consider the growth opportunities of a circular economy when making policy. Government departments should embed circular economy principles and the Treasury should review tax structures to ensure new builds are not fiscally favoured over refurbishments.

Places for People

3.1 Burning platform

The built environment must be resilient and adaptive to the increased risks of flooding, extreme heat and climate volatility. There is, however, tension between the demand for rapid growth and the need for sustainable placemaking. We must balance these competing needs and find a way to achieve the goal of better-built places and greener spaces across the UK. While this does happen in pockets due to the desires of local actors to work together, this is despite

current planning and funding systems and we need to find ways to unlock this on a grander scale. But first, we must understand the implications of the Government’s Planning and Infrastructure Bill. The Bill will speed up and streamline the planning process to build more homes and accelerate the delivery of major infrastructure projects. These projects will be aligned with the industrial, energy and transport strategies.

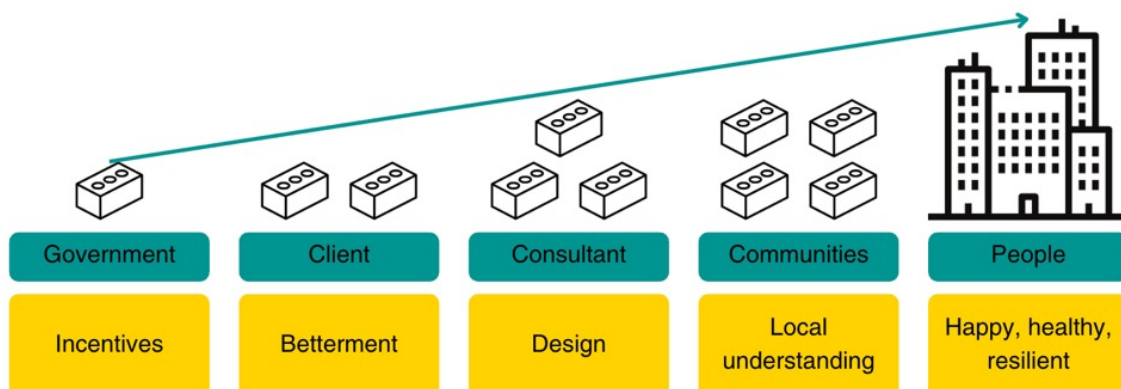
3.2 Summary of the discussion

The panel and delegates discussed the need for a good planning framework to support growth, the importance of building resilience into places with a primary focus to create communities, not just developments. The discussion was summarised by outlining the role stakeholders have in building these communities and making them places that people want to live in:

1. The **Government** must put in place the right incentives, including updating the National Policy Statements (NPS) to encourage betterment. It must also implement robust policies including in the forthcoming National Planning Framework.
2. **Clients** must have an informed conversation about the benefits of betterment in their developments. There is

data to support this and it is also an area that **consultants** can help them develop. Furthermore, in the **consultant teams**, everyone should consider themselves a designer and consider how their input can create happy and healthy places.

3. **Communities** play a vital role in ensuring developments are sympathetic to their environment and we should be better at engaging with them. The room agreed that there are often more YIMBYs than NIMBYs and that power can be harnessed.
4. **People** – most importantly, we need to think about the people ultimately living in these communities. They need to be happy, healthy and resilient to future extreme weather.





3.3 Our policy

A review of the economics of climate change adaptation including nature-based solutions. The review, released alongside the budget, should assess the long-term costs of the risks outlined in the Climate Change Risk Assessment. The review should define the level of risk the UK is prepared to tolerate.

A refreshed infrastructure strategy alongside a long-term funding settlement: The strategy should provide a deliverable roadmap for the built environment and consultants up to 2050. This should include methods to de-risk and grow private investment as part of the funding mix.

A brownfield first approach: Brownfield development is inextricably linked to many government priorities, including housing and infrastructure. To improve the economic viability of brownfield sites Government should make a series of fiscal changes, including an increase to land remediation tax relief, and the introduction of a greenfield surcharge. Policies and regulation should incentivise brownfield use and unlock permit issuing delays.

Review National Policy Statements (NPS) with clear criteria for triggering reviews of other NPSs.



Panellist reflections

“The circular economy approach goes beyond materials management strategies. It gives us the opportunity to redefine value creation through better design, better material choices, and better business models, for solutions that contribute to tackling the triple crisis of pollution, biodiversity loss, and the climate emergency – all of which are driven by our business-as-usual take-make-waste model.”

Jocelyn Blériot

Executive Lead, Policy and Institutions - Project Executive Sponsor – Ellen MacArthur Foundation

“It’s undeniable that transitioning to a circular economy is crucial to the future health and prosperity of our planet and ultimately will be good for the economy too. Government has a crucial role to play in setting the policy direction, and it’s essential that a clear agenda is established which puts the waste and resources sector higher up the political agenda. Our sector is a key player in the green transition, and as such we’re keen to play our part in the delivery of a more resource-efficient, lower carbon, circular economy.”

Dr Adam Read MBE

Chief Sustainability and External Affairs Officer at SUEZ recycling and recovery UK

“The National Infrastructure Commission advises government on long term infrastructure policy across six sectors, including waste. Our second National Infrastructure Assessment, published in 2023, warned that significant delays to key reforms have created uncertainty. This is preventing the necessary investment in new and improved recycling capacity that can support the wider transition to a circular economy. While recent initiatives have provided more clarity, the government must now sustain this momentum as it moves to implement the Collection and Packaging Reforms. It should also create stronger incentives to invest in recycling infrastructure by sending a clear signal on the future of energy from waste in a circular economy.”

James Harris

Senior Policy Advisor, National Infrastructure Commission

“Embedding blue and green infrastructure into the design of airports could boost resilience to extreme weather events and consequently offers not just a good outcome for climate, nature and wellbeing, but for maintaining high levels of service.”

Matt Prescott

Head of Carbon Strategy, Heathrow Airport

“The UN has been clear that high consumption of materials, particularly in wealthy countries like the UK, is driving the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature’s degradation and pollution. Globally, resource extraction and processing are responsible for a whopping 55 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions and 90 per cent of biodiversity loss and water stress. This means, though, that there really is also one solution to the crisis: rethinking resource use, which can best be achieved by adopting circular economy principles with the need for reduction at their heart.”

Libby Peake

Head of Resource Policy, Green Alliance

Call to action

Recommendations

1.

The Departments for Energy Security and Net Zero and Environment Farming and Rural Affairs must take a 'One Crisis' approach to climate and nature. Plans for nature and delivering net zero must be aligned. Government should ensure that planning and infrastructure decisions address nature, climate and health together, to ensure efficient delivery. Circular economy, chemical, air quality, water and soil strategies need to be proportionate and align with international best practice.

The 'green thread' of one crisis should be embedded throughout Government policy and our member's approach to projects.

2.

A value-based approach to procurement: Government must do more to drive best practice across all local and national government market opportunities, with a cultural shift in how contracts are scored and awarded. This should be supported through compliance with the Construction Playbook, reinforced through government support and best practice.

Working with our members, clients should consider the business benefits of addressing 'one crisis' in their projects and include opportunities to go above compliance to positive outcomes through a value-based approach to procurement.

3.

A review of the economics of climate change adaptation including nature-based solutions. The review, released alongside the budget, should assess the long-term costs of the risks outlined in the Climate Change Risk Assessment. The review should define the level of risk the UK is prepared to tolerate.

The Treasury should recalibrate taxes to incentivise the circular economy, particularly on VAT discrepancies between new-build and refurbishment.

4.

Review National Policy Statements (NPS) with clear criteria for triggering reviews of other NPSs. The Department for Housing, Local and Community should review the National Policy Statements to incentivise including betterment in building developments.

Conclusion

The best and brightest minds can develop the best technologies and the greatest plans but they need to collaborate and have government policies in place to facilitate progress.

Data-based storytelling is essential to galvanise businesses, politicians and communities to not only support our plans but also to generate the investment needed for them to succeed. Efficiencies gained along with the environmental and nature benefits are opportunities ready for the taking.

“Our seminar made it abundantly clear that we need to propel action and collaborate across industry, and work in partnership with Government. True progress can only be realised through a holistic and integrated plan with nature at the centre. Our members are poised ready to develop and be part of the approach needed to address this crisis we face.”

Kate Jennings

Chief Executive Officer ACE/EIC



Thank you

Thank you to everyone who attended our seminar and who have read our report. This is the first of these events where we look to bring everyone together, and we hope it will be a catalyst for moving forward. Hearing the conversations from the seminar and noting the excellent work and innovation EIC members deliver every day, we can all be optimistic about the future.

**If you would like to get involved please
email us at policyteam@acenet.co.uk**



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