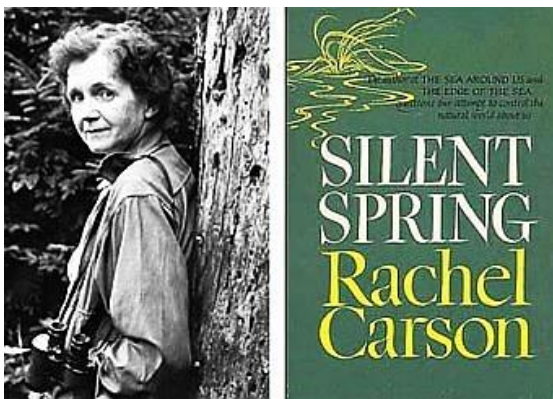


The Stream of Time: CEP's 25th anniversary

Ric Eales, Managing Director, Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP) (r.eales@cep.co.uk)

'The stream of time moves forward and mankind moves with it. Your generation must come to terms with the environment. You must face realities instead of taking refuge in ignorance and evasion of truth. Yours is a grave and sobering responsibility, but it is also a shining opportunity. You go out into a world where mankind is challenged, as it has never been challenged before, to prove its maturity and its mastery — not of nature, but of itself. Therein lies our hope and our destiny'.

Rachel Carson speaking to graduates in California in 1962



I was introduced to Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* as a young undergraduate in the 1980s by my supervisor Professor Tim O'Riordan. Tim was a key inspiration and mentor to me, albeit a challenging one.

Thanks in part to Tim, in June 1995 I had the confidence to embark on a journey, or perhaps more accurately an expedition. I founded an environmental consultancy and [Collingwood Environmental Planning \(CEP\)](#) emerged as a result.

If the CEP story is about anything, it is about people. Inspiring, innovative and supportive people. Whether they be current or former colleagues, collaborators or clients, it is the people who have shaped the CEP journey.

Our 25th anniversary seems an appropriate point to share some reflections and to contemplate on the future.

'Your generation must come to terms with the environment'

Let me take you back to June 1995. In the charts, Britpop was at its most popular, with Oasis and Blur battling it out. In UK politics,

New Labour was emerging – towards the end of 1994 Tony Blair had become Leader of the Opposition. John Major's Conservative government was in trouble – with recovery slow following the 'Black Wednesday' economic disaster in 1992, and the party was deeply divided over the UK's membership of the European Union we certainly didn't predict back then that this would play out two decades later with the Conservative government still attempting to manage its divisions by offering a Brexit referendum!

John Gummer, was Secretary of State for the Environment in 1995. He introduced the 1995 Environment Act, which created the Environment Agency from its predecessor organisations. The Environment Agency has been a key client for CEP from the beginning. Often referred to as the best Environment Secretary the UK has ever had, Gummer's reputation is perhaps often less favourably associated with his attempts in 1990 to refute the growing evidence for BSE/Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease by feeding his four-year-old daughter a burger before press cameras parallels perhaps in March 2020 when Prime Minister Johnson boasted about shaking hands "with everybody" at a hospital with confirmed Covid-19 patients, which conflicted with his own government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies advice. There is relevance here to CEP's long-term work promoting the use of evidence and evaluation to inform and support policy development and decision-making it seems we have more advocacy work to do in this regard!

On the international stage, the Rio 'Earth Summit' had taken place three years prior (June 1992) and by April 1995 the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development – which was set up to ensure effective follow-up of the Earth Summit - had held its Third Session. The need for a national level framework to integrate economic, social and environmental issues, and bring together sectoral plans in a more integrated and participatory manner, was noted in that meeting. Unfortunately in 2020, this lesson is still to be learnt – our ongoing work for the European Environment Agency (EEA) on urban

sustainability using nexus analysis, for example, has shown there is still a critical need to work across policy and sectorial silos to deliver meaningful sustainability transitions. Back in 1995, like CEP, the EEA was in its infancy, having been created a couple of years before. Along with the Environment Agency in the UK, the EEA has been a fundamental part of CEP's journey and our work with them has been some of our most stimulating. Just when we need a collaborative approach to key challenges like the climate crisis, the UK not continuing its membership of the EEA is a particularly concerning example of the collateral damage of Brexit.

Also in 1995, the first UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) had just taken place in Berlin. At COP1 the United States pushed back against legally binding targets and timetables, but it still joined other parties in agreeing to negotiations to strengthen commitments on limiting greenhouse gases. The concluding document - the Berlin Mandate - laid the groundwork for what became the Kyoto Protocol. This was much criticised by environmental activists as a political solution that did not prompt immediate action this has clear echoes of today when the evidence is screaming that we must act much faster and go further in response to the climate crisis. I will come back to leadership, but the postponed COP26 in Glasgow in 2021 is a huge opportunity we cannot afford to miss. The UK should not be forgiven by the global community if it doesn't step up to use COP26 to steer the international recovery from the Covid-19 crisis along a fundamentally more inclusive and sustainable climate path.

'Putting the environment and communities at the heart of decision-making'

This is CEP's vision and has framed our work over the last 25 years. What makes us different as an environmental consultancy is our ability to operate at the nexus of research and practice, our inter-disciplinary approach, and our focus on new challenges and innovative approaches.

Our flexibility and innovation have come with challenges, but have also made our work more rewarding and interesting. We hope it has also enabled us to make a more valuable contribution to our clients, as well as making CEP a stimulating place to work. We have had a fantastic team over the years, and I hope CEP has provided a particularly fertile environment for everyone to grow and develop as professionals with a common interest in striving to support more sustainable outcomes.



I cannot easily summarise our 25-year body of work, but some highlights we are most proud of include:

- Promoting a holistic, participatory and partnership approach to the **management of river catchments and flood risk**¹
- Contributing to the **EEA's State of the Environment reporting and integrated assessments** over nearly 20 years which have informed European environmental policy and debate²
- Advocating the importance of the **relationship between people and the environment** including, for example, work on the mental health and wellbeing benefits of nature³ and consideration of social impacts as part of major infrastructure project assessments
- Building good practice and capacity, and improving the effectiveness of **environmental assessment** (SEA and EIA) to support more evidence-based decision making⁴

¹ e.g. contributions to Environment Agency's catchment plans, the Catchment based approach (CaBA) and the [Flood Resilience Community Pathfinder Evaluation](#)

² e.g. [The European environment - state and outlook 2020. Knowledge for transition to a sustainable Europe](#)

³ e.g. [The Health and Social Benefits of Nature and Biodiversity Protection](#) for the European Commission

⁴ e.g. our SEA training courses at Imperial College in the 2000s, and Guidance on Integrating Climate Change and Biodiversity into [Environmental Impact Assessment](#) and [Strategic](#)

- Integrating **social research** and meaningful and effective **engagement and participation** into environmental decision making⁵
- Developing and applying innovative **evaluation approaches and methods** in complex environmental policy contexts in the UK and EU⁶
- Providing critical insights into **future risks and opportunities** across a range of environmental and sustainability topics⁷
- Developing approaches to analyse **sustainability transitions and pro-environmental behaviours**⁸
- Developing understanding of **resilience and social vulnerability**, including the role of communities in resilience to climate change and recovery from flooding⁹



Queen's Walk Window Gardens on the Southbank in London was supported by the CEP team (2013)

'Our hope and our destiny'

In some ways it was a very different world back in 1995, but in other ways it seems the same. Many of the lessons regarding the anthropogenic impacts on the environment remain to be learnt and we face many of the same challenges ... they are now even more urgent and critical. The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a brighter spotlight on these challenges and the need for effective action. Ensuring we are prepared for the next pandemic needs to be integrated with tackling the climate

[Environmental Assessment](#) and the [REFIT evaluation of the SEA Directive](#) both for the European Commission

⁵ e.g. our [review of community engagement in Flood Awareness Wales](#) for NRW and [Consumer attitudes towards emerging technologies](#) for FSA

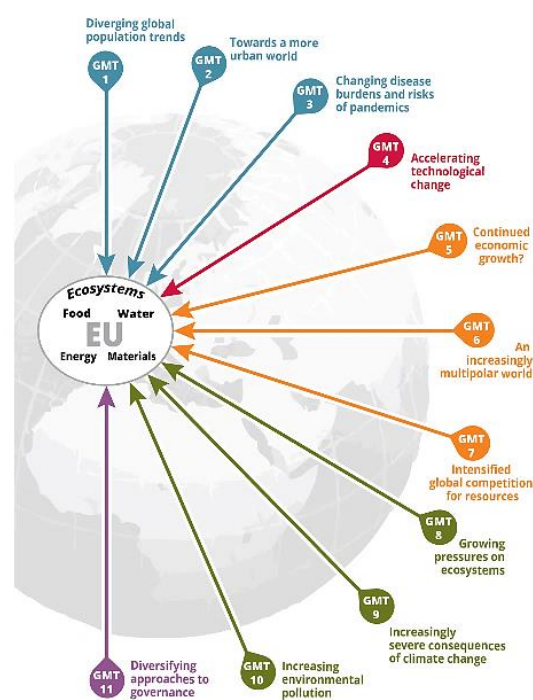
⁶ e.g. our contribution to [CECAN](#) (The Centre for the Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus) and evaluations such as of the [Nature Improvement Areas](#) and [biodiversity offsetting](#) for Defra

⁷ e.g. [Survey on public perceptions of environmental risks](#) for the European Commission, designing the approach and managing the European Commission's [FORENV](#) system

(Foresight System for the detection of emerging environmental

emergency and ecological crisis – our response must be global, forward-looking, evidence-based, collaborative and holistic.

We were not prepared or resilient to a pandemic in the UK or indeed in much of the world. Years of austerity and short-termism in the UK will, I suspect, emerge as key contributing factors in the analysis of lessons once the crisis is over. The risks of pandemics had been predicted, but had largely fallen on the deaf ears of politicians. Back in 2015, for example, a pandemic was one of the global mega trends considered to be of key importance for Europe's long-term environmental outlook in the EEA report we helped to prepare¹⁰. If Rachel Carson thought we were challenged like never before nearly 60 years ago, she would be shocked by the ongoing immaturity of humankind to face up to the challenges confronting us in 2020.



Impacts of global megatrends on European resource systems, EEA¹⁰

In kickstarting the response to the crisis, we need a new and transformative agenda. We need to transition to more resilient and just

issues) and supporting the EEA in drafting the report on [Drivers of change of relevance for Europe's environment and sustainability](#)

⁸ e.g. work on [enhancing local delivery and implementation of the 25 Year Environment Plan](#) for Defra and ongoing work for the EEA on urban environmental sustainability

⁹ e.g. work for Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) on [community resilience to climate change](#) and on the concept of [flood resilience](#) for Defra

¹⁰ [European environment — state and outlook 2015: Assessment of global megatrends](#)

systems that protect those who are most vulnerable. We need to completely reframe the use of GDP as the measure of economic performance which has exposed us to risks such as pandemics and driven the climate emergency. GDP cannot tell us if our health services are fit for purpose, if we are living within environmental limits, or if people are being treated equally. Instead, the response and measurement of success needs to be centred around the well-being of people and the planet, recognising that they are inherently interconnected.

As part of our discussions on the crisis and how to respond, we brainstormed ideas around what should be included in a manifesto for the green recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. The figure appended below highlights some of the suggestions put forward – many thanks to CEP colleagues and CEP friends for your ideas. Eight broad, but interrelated, clusters emerged:

- Working and home life - learning lessons from Covid-19
- Liveability of cities
- Rethinking mobility
- Improving energy systems
- Wellbeing and social justice
- Transitions and a green recovery
- Building climate resilience
- Biodiversity and land management

These are just some initial ideas. It is encouraging that other organisations and think tanks are already putting forward their more fully developed manifestos – I would commend, for example, the *WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19*¹¹ and the Institute for Public Policy Research's *Faster, further, fairer: Putting people at the heart of tackling the climate and nature emergency*¹². It is clear that we need to come out of this crisis with an economy and a society that is more able to withstand future shocks and tackle the climate crisis; we need the vision and foresight to bounce forward, not just return to the old status quo; we need to plan for a new climate, adapting faster than the climate is changing; and we need a future where people and nature can thrive.

¹¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/who-manifesto-for-a-healthy-recovery-from-covid-19>



A key question though, is where the leadership is going to come from to deliver such a manifesto within the narrow policy window available. It seems very unlikely it will come from the current incumbents in London or Washington. The emerging Green Deal from Brussels has potential, but will it go far or fast enough? Perhaps like Rachel Carson in 1962, we must entrust our hopes with the next generation to drive change and provide leadership. Greta Thunberg and the movement of young climate activists provide a glimpse of what is possible. As part of a current project for The Wildlife Trusts we are evaluating Our Bright Future¹³ - a programme helping young people gain skills and experience and improve their wellbeing, whilst acting as catalysts for change in local environment and community. The impressive and committed young people we have spoken to as part of this project have certainly given cause for optimism.

Clearly with the economic situation caused by the pandemic small and medium-sized consultancies like CEP will face challenges in surviving and flourishing again. But I am confident, given the inspiring, innovative and supportive people involved and the unique set of skills we offer, we can continue on our journey and make a valuable contribution to the recovery. I feel optimistic about the next generation, and hope that by the time CEP reaches its 50th anniversary there will be many more positive changes to look back on and the health of the environmental outlook will be more assured.

¹² <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/faster-further-fairer>

¹³ <http://www.ourbrightfuture.co.uk/>

Results of our brainstorm of ideas on what should be included in a manifesto for the green recovery from the Covid-19 crisis

