

COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma: “Pick the planet”

- COP26 is our “best chance” of limiting rising global temperatures to 1.5C
- Mr Sharma to stress the need to end coal power to tackle climate change
- Speech details UK’s efforts as hosts of COP26 between now and Glasgow

This year’s major climate summit COP26 will be the world’s best chance of building a cleaner, greener future, COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma will say today (Friday 14 May).

In a major speech outside of Glasgow where, in six months’ time COP26 will have wrapped up, Mr Sharma will outline how the UK is striving to make sure these two weeks are the moment that every country and every part of society embraces their responsibility to protect our planet.

He will be supported by government ministers who will be taking part in climate-related visits throughout Friday to show how the UK is greening all parts of society – from hospitals and prisons, to jobs and transport.

The COP26 President-Designate’s speech will explain how the UK is working towards success in Glasgow. This centres around working with all countries to make a consistent and concerted effort in four areas: Limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees, enabling communities and natural habitats to adapt to the impacts of climate change, mobilising climate finance, and working together to deliver action.

COP26 will bring together climate negotiators from 196 countries, the EU, as well as businesses, organisations, experts and world leaders at the SEC in Glasgow from 1-12 November.

Six years on from COP21, when the Paris Agreement was reached and the world agreed to limit global warming to 1.5C, this year’s summit will be where all countries commit to the action needed to keep this target alive.

COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma is expected to say:

This is our last hope of keeping 1.5 degrees alive. Our best chance of building a brighter future. A future of green jobs and cleaner air. I have faith that world leaders will rise to the occasion and not be found wanting in their tryst with destiny. That, in six months time, when we are packing up and going home, we will be able to say that at this critical juncture, each of us took responsibility. That we chose to act. And that we kept 1.5 degrees alive.

In preparing for this speech I asked my daughters what message I should give to world leaders about their priorities. Their response

was simple: “please, tell them to pick the planet.” And that’s the message I want to leave you with today. A message from my daughters. A message from future generations. This is our moment. There are no second chances. Let’s pick the planet.

The speech will have a particular focus on the importance of ending the world’s reliance on coal, and embracing the opportunities of renewable power.

On this, Mr Sharma is expected to say:

Because if we are serious about 1.5 degrees, Glasgow must be the COP that consigns coal to history... we are working directly with governments, and through international organisations. To end international coal financing. This is a personal priority. And to urge countries to abandon coal power, with the G7 leading the way.

Whilst working with developing countries to support their transition to clean energy...

...The days of coal providing the cheapest form of power are in the past. And in the past they must remain... The coal business is, as the UN Secretary General has said, going up in smoke. It’s old technology. So let’s make COP26 the moment we leave it in the past where it belongs, while supporting workers and communities to make the transition. Creating good green jobs to fill the gap.

The UK is leading the way in climate action. In 2012, 40% of our electricity came from coal. That figure is now less than 2%. Which shows that change is possible. The UK was the first country to pledge to reduce carbon emissions by 78% by 2035, we will completely phase out coal power by 2024 and will end the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030.

Indeed going green and boosting prosperity are not mutually exclusive, over the last 30 years British governments have grown our economy by 78% while cutting emissions by 44%.

Michelle Scrimgeour, Chief Executive Officer, Legal & General Investment Management and Co-Chair, COP26 Business Leaders Group said:

To create a better future we need to harness collective agreement to focus on net zero commitments. Our purpose is unequivocal in protecting both society and future generations from the consequences of climate change.

This is also the investment opportunity of our lifetime. Coming together as business leaders, in the countdown to the COP26 Summit, we can align our influence and financial might to the net zero ambition and so produce positive sustainable economic and environmental returns. This is inclusive capitalism in action –

inaction is not an option.

Bella Lack, UK youth climate leader said:

Right now our species is undermining and destabilising the very foundations that are necessary for life on earth to thrive. We know that things are changing, and COP 26 is one of our last and most crucial opportunities to make sure it is humanity that has to change, and not the planet.

Belinda Gordon, Strategy director, Green Alliance said:

As the impacts of climate change are felt throughout the world, COP26 will be a vital coming together for nations to pave a way to a greener and more prosperous world. Only through a step change in the pace and scale of ambition at COP26 will we have a fighting chance of keeping the most dangerous impacts of climate change at bay.

For the UK, as COP26 hosts, we must inspire leadership globally through action at home and play a strong role in steering negotiations to keep global temperatures well below 1.5 degrees.

- Alok Sharma will be speaking at 0945 on 14/05/2021 and [can be viewed here](#).
- COP26 is regarded widely as the most significant climate event since COP21, the 2015 United Nations climate conference which resulted in the Paris Agreement. At Paris, for the first time, the world set the goal to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels (1850-1900).
- COP26 is the agreed five-yearly stocktake point where countries will agree action to reach this 1.5C target.