

Launching the Tech Zero Taskforce

It's great to be here – and I don't know about you, but I think there's a real spirit of optimism and energy in the air. Regardless of the decision we have to take today in relation to the final stage of opening up, you can just feel that energy and vibrancy returning.

And you see a place like this, in the heart of London, that has been renewed over the past 20 years – and tech has been at the heart of it. That really fills me with a sense of hope for the future, and I feel like whatever happens, we're through the worst of this terrible crisis.

It really is a pleasure to be here – and it's a pleasure to see how CogX has grown even in the past three or four years that I've been involved with you, going from strength to strength, like so much of the tech sector in this country.

Indeed, so much has changed since I spoke just last year here.

Back then, absolutely everything was virtual. I think we're still sort of feeling our way through the experience of being back in rooms with people. But the idea of having even 30 people in a room like this would have seemed extraordinary a year ago.

And yet here we are, working our way back to normality, step by step. We can go to the pub and out for dinner with friends; we can sit in a stadium, or attend events like this.

But it's really important to remember that all of this would not have been possible – that we simply would not be here today – without the power of human ingenuity.

Without bright minds – many of them in this country – who, when faced with a completely novel virus that was devastating health systems across the world, turned to science and tech to innovate their way out of this crisis.

Through genome sequencing, through mRNA and other groundbreaking vaccine technologies, these innovators turned COVID from something that brought life to a standstill, to something we can hopefully live with in the long-term.

Humans have of course long innovated their way out of adversity. Now it's time for tech to take on one of the greatest challenges that we face as a global society.

Of course, as you know, in 2019, the UK became the first major economy in the world to commit to bringing all greenhouse emissions to net zero by 2050.

It is one of the most ambitious targets in the world – and of course government alone cannot deliver on this. We need the smartest thinkers and most audacious entrepreneurs to help us get there.

So today, we are officially booting up our fight against climate change with a new Tech Zero Taskforce, made up of 16 of the UK's biggest and most innovative tech companies.

They range from Bulb to Olio to Starling Bank to Revolut.

Between them, they have transformed energy, banking and healthcare, and used tech to tackle the problems we face, like food waste.

Now they're going to engineer, hack and code their way back to lower emissions.

Their aim is to get 1,000 UK companies to sign up to Net Zero, to the pledge we have made, before the COP26 summit in November, and speed up the UK's race to Net Zero.

And today I can confirm that telecoms giant Vodafone is officially on board, as are Monzo and OakNorth.

And I really do hope that this marks a turning point in our fight against climate change. And it's right that the tech industry, as ever, leads the charge.

Firstly, like the rest of us, it's in the existential threat to the interests of these businesses. You really do need to act.

But it's also, I hope you agree, in tech businesses' economic self-interest to do so, as well.

Just the energy efficiencies alone that come from green investment are expected to unlock billions of pounds for companies, according to some estimates. Think about the value that brings. And that's not counting the revenue opportunities from low-carbon goods and services.

So the digital drive to Net Zero is also an economic one, and I believe, a profitable one.

It's no accident that the greentech revolution is kicking off here in the UK – the tech capital of Europe.

We're by far the biggest hub for tech firms and for venture capital funding.

And I know we were discussing this earlier: unicorn is one of those slightly hackneyed phrases now, but we are home to 99 unicorns and counting.

And of course, as you were saying Charlie, the government is pushing an unashamedly pro-tech agenda for the coming years, so that we can continue to attract top talent, help our brilliant tech firms grow, and use digital innovation to fuel an era of tech growth.

And I do believe we are already seeing this golden age for UK tech.

But my aim today, as the Tech Zero Taskforce comes together for the first

time, is to make clear that you have this government's full support.

I'm keen to know what more we can do to help you achieve your goal, and how government can throw its backing behind some of the most talented people in tech and tackle one of the greatest challenges of our time.

And that's the ambition we're setting out today. And without further ado, I'll hand back to you, Tabitha.