

Hertfordshire Futures Debates

Shaping a Greener Economy

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The Economic
Strategy
Webinar Series

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Conversation



Chaired by Matt Deegan,
radio and podcast host



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"Welcome to Hertfordshire Futures Debates 'Shaping a Greener Economy.' I'm Matt Deegan.

The government stated that its #1 mission is growth, but it can't be pursued at any cost. Today we're looking at how we can grow the local economy in such a way to support net zero and incentivise green investments while delivering the homes and infrastructure so badly needed.

We got a great panel for you today bringing together a mix of private and public sector partners together to explore how we can shape a greener economy that supports people, places and the planet.

Sadly, sickness has claimed both Neil Rutledge and Lynne Ceeney, but stepping in is Neil Hayes, the CEO of Hertfordshire Futures. Thank you, Neil, for joining us. He's going to be joining Chris Hulatt Co-Founder of the Octopus Group. Kerry Doble, Chief Sustainability Officer at Lintbells, Ian Pigott, Managing Partner of Thrales End Farm and Business Centre.

Also we'd like to get you involved as well, if you've got questions, do put them in the chat box and hopefully I'll get to them at the end.

Neil, it's a difficult job to balance green concerns while driving economic development, isn't it?"

Neil Hayes, CEO, Hertfordshire Futures

"It is, but I think with all challenges you need to face them head on. As you've indicated, this is one of three debates we're having on the back of the Economic Strategy engagement we did last year, and it's recognising the issues that residents and businesses and the stakeholders are putting front and centre.

"So, sustainability I think is an issue in terms of the economy at the end of the day. We're charged to develop an Economic Strategy, but that has to be informed properly to have a better understanding of some of these issues. And I don't think it's an either/or argument personally. I do think that you can have a strong economy, you can have further growth, but you can do it in a way that also achieves sustainability ambitions, but also, I think you can exploit opportunities. I think Hertfordshire has the component parts of a nascent sector around environmental technologies and other uses that we can exploit as well."

Matt

"So what's Hertfordshire been doing so far in this space?"

Neil

"I think if you look at in terms of the sort of sector assets, we've got some outstanding research institutes. So, we've got the likes of Rothamsted Research doing plant-based research. We've got BRE (Building Research Establishment) doing this sort of sustainable construction research, and we also have places like the University of Hertfordshire that have got sort of centre for sustainability, that's one of their new focus in terms of their investment. So, we've got great kind of academic research. We've also got great institutional businesses such as RES (Renewal Energy Systems) that are kind of leading the way. So, we've got a good industrial base. I think the opportunities for us is to grow that.

“So how do we make sure that those opportunities could be taken forward by all our businesses, but we also recognise that Hertfordshire needs to play its role in terms of decarbonisation. And how can we work with all businesses across Hertfordshire to both become more sustainable but also become more efficient? Again, this is one of these arguments where I don't think there's a mutual exclusivity about that.

“I think you can go on a sustainability journey and you can also improve your bottom line. I think there's more to do in that space. I think the other issue is around Hertfordshire in general. It's a beautiful place. We all we all love to live, work and learn in Hertfordshire, but with everything there's a trade-off, so we have a very sort of pointed mix of urban and rural. We also have the challenges of economic growth and its impact in terms of provision of housing, in terms of provision of employment space and in terms of transport infrastructure, so all of those things that you know there isn't necessarily a linear solution, but I think as part of these debates we're trying to get a better understanding in order to move forwards.”

Matt

“To be green, do you have to sort of do no harm?”

Neil

“I don't believe it's as kind of binary as that. I believe that all businesses can be more sustainable and be more progressive as a result. I also believe that if we all want to protect our environment and again, we're not talking about the planet I'm talking about from a Hertfordshire perspective, if we want to maintain all of those assets, then we have to work harder in order to achieve that. So whether that's decarbonisation, suggestion of businesses improving the housing stock either in retrofit and decarbonisation at public housing stock and private housing stock, and then when we're building new homes or building new infrastructure.

Not just sort of delivering sort of industry standard. How can we be better than industry standard in terms of sustainability criteria? How can we be a progressive area that is going to be challenged with developing a significant amount of homes, 100,000 homes over the next few decades? How can we do that in a way that almost goes back to where we've been in Hertfordshire over 100 years? We've been a place pioneer from the 1st Garden Suburb, Garden City, the first new towns. How can we have some of that pioneering spirit with sustainability at the core of our new growth areas such as Hemel Garden Communities and Harlow Gilston.”

Matt

“When you talk about building 100,000 homes, it's a significant challenge for the for the county and for I guess I guess for residents as well. The government very obviously keen to for everyone to build. How do we how do we bring in, you know, an environmental aspect? Well, still probably recognising that for a lot of residents they're not going to be so keen on some of these developments.”

Neil

“Again, like everything, there's a trade-off, isn't there? I think the opportunity in Hertfordshire in terms of housing is how do we actually go back to some of that pioneering spirit. So how can we make some of those new settlements kind of cutting edge, having the technologies that we have - EV charging, we

have heat pumps, we have solar and we are reducing our kind of dependence on transport in order to get a get around and become more sustainable. So I think you can still do that. I think obviously there are challenges in terms of making that economically viable, but I also think places like Hertfordshire that we recognise there is an element of value in terms of housing and a value in terms of the premium that's in places like Hertfordshire, we should be pushing that agenda and we should be making sure that, you know, we don't just have development at any cost, that sustainability should be one of the criteria that we set a high bar for if we want to continue to grow and develop those homes in the future."

Matt

"And for businesses, I guess business parks and destinations like IQ can really help companies grow in, in green ways.

Neil

"Absolutely, I mean Hertfordshire has an enterprise zone and there are a number of enterprise zones across the country, but in Hertfordshire, we focused on sustainable technologies because we believe that that is an area of growth. Again, I mentioned BRE and Rothamsted. They're part of that Hearts IQ Enterprise Zone. And the model is about growing in the technology and capability in those hot houses of R&D and with the university and enable them to grow in a location that they can move on and they can develop, they can build, more staff and actually some of the technologies that they end up develop and using we can apply in other parts of Hertfordshire, so they're not only growing a valuable sector that will contribute to R&D, but it might be able to introduce technologies that are going to address some of our sustainability issues in construction or transport or other issues. So, I think that's a win-win for Hertfordshire."

Matt

"Is there anything anybody else is doing that we should duplicate or be inspired by?"

Neil

"I think you can always learn and I'm not precious about where we learn from if there are better sort of adaptation from technologies that we need to be doing more closely, I think you'll hear from the panel in terms of what they're respectively doing. I think that what we should be doing as Herts Futures is making it easier for businesses to understand what opportunities from becoming more sustainable, reducing their carbon footprint? That it's not a kind of must do issue. I think it's about how can we help them start that journey and equally how can we look exploit the capabilities that we've got that we've got, we've got a number of businesses, we've got actually quite a few construction companies headquartered in Hertfordshire. How can we work with them to sort of pivot and move towards developing new technologies so that we are again setting the standard for what sustainable development looks like?"

Matt

"Thanks for that.

"Ian. You're a Managing Partner at Thrales End Farm and Business Centre, I mean it's evolved over time. I was looking at the website and looking at the sort of the family history of it all and their sort of traditional farming at some point, kind of pick your own strawberries and that and farming has always

had to grow and develop that you've now built a business centre that attracts companies to work with you. What's that evolution been like whilst you've been in charge of the space?"

Ian Pigott, Managing Partner, Thrales End Farm and Business Centre

"I suppose fundamentally it's been the farming, the core of the business has been agriculture and farming, and it's always been trying to adapt the business to contend with the challenges of Brexit or just low commodity prices or what have you and being based in Hertfordshire, you know we're very fortunate. We've got a fantastic opportunity with lots of people on our doorstep to diversify into events or as you've mentioned, into housing offices.

"But you know it's, I would say it's definitely changed in the last 15 years because we recognise that our shifts in agriculture are actually recognised and valued by our business tenants. So for example, we made a shift towards regenerative farming about 11 years ago, so that that means not ploughing the soil. So trying to increase soil organic carbon, trying to improve the habitats on the farm, trying to increase biodiversity and actually the business tenants that aligns a lot of them with what their aspirations are for their own business in terms of their values, but also their vision set as well. So yeah, we didn't develop one necessarily in tandem with the other, but we see that they have mutual benefit."

Matt

"How do the different elements of that business kind of work together? What's driving the growth for your organisation?"

Ian

"Well, it's a little bit like what Neil was talking about, but it's understanding that if you can shift your gaze away from it just being about the economics, obviously.

"But there's a corny expression that we use in farming that you can't farm green if you're farming in the red and but which is, you know, is difficult decisions. And the way that our businesses happen to evolve means that we can take longer term views. For example, regenerative farming. It doesn't get recognised by the marketplace in terms of farming uses crude metrics like yield per hectare. So we work on net margin, we work on biodiversity impact, a lot of stuff that Kerry might talk about with B Corp and so understanding that we want to do right by the environment because we understand actually that if we if we mine the environment, if we mine the soil that we farm, that we as a family of farmers for generations, but we recognise that what we've always done is having a detrimental effect.

"So, we have to change our practice and we have to take a view that isn't just five or ten years. Our horizon needs to be for the next generation and that might mean that you go through periods of economic stagnation. But we, you know, just through those changes, through working with the likes of Rothamsted, we've seen that, for example, our soil organic carbon has doubled in the last 10 years, something that we didn't think was possible because we were able to take a long view and said actually, we're just trying to maintain the status quo and economically to benefit environmentally."

Matt

"But you talk about red and green there. I thought it's a thing lots of people who are watching are thinking about, like sometimes this sort of seems the right thing to do, but it's hard to do that if you're if you're struggling. What would you say to organisations that are grappling with that issue?"

Ian

"Yeah. I don't think there is a straightforward answer. I'm sure Chris will have better insights than I, but I. Umm. We've all got to do our bit, haven't we? We can't just 'drill-baby-drill', it's not going to work so with the farm because it's the most tangible thing to explain. Because you have so many levers that you can pull on, it's also given a lot more joy to the business to recognise that actually, if you're building a strategy that is this building is built around improving the social contribution.

"And the economic and the environmental contribution that actually that feels that I think when we're trying to draw in a marketplace of employing younger people, where those things perhaps matter to people of my generation in how we were brought up, if you if you don't align in that way, then you'll really struggle to get the best staff as well."

Matt

"What have you learnt from the businesses that have joined you on the farm? That must have been quite a big change. You're obviously getting feedback from them about what's important to their operations too."

Ian

"In terms of their aspirations for?"

Matt

"Inspiring you for what you do. Hearing more about what they're up to."

Ian

"Well, I suppose it's what is important to them and it's often the things that you know, to try and attract a business to come and be based when you say that you're going to be based on a farm. To many of us, that's not for us, but they need to see it. They need to understand that actually that whole biophilia piece, being working in an environment with green space is good for the well-being of your staff and your teams. Being able to turn up and actually park, you know, just little things that might start the mindset in the right in the right direction, but also trying we're trying to create a community. So this has been our most recent shift is about place making and I think to answer your earlier question.."

Matt

"What does that place-making mean?"

Ian

"Well to answer your earlier question, this is the most difficult piece because it. Economically, it perhaps doesn't stack up to, for example, to the older generation. My father's still, you know, likes to have an eye on the business. To him, it's an anathema, because why would we put in stuff that looks like a cost? So it's building.

"It might be doing quarterly farm walks for people to understand what habitats we're trying to build up. You know, because that then can be a team-building exercise amongst businesses, but also to understand what other businesses are based next door to them that they might have, you know, they might be able to offer services to one another, so that would be one thing. We have an education

charity, so helping out the businesses are basically understanding that we also have a charity makes them say 'OK. So, this business we're buying into that', so that that's I think is important and also making people recognise that here in Hertfordshire, we're incredibly fortunate. You know that there are, that we've got, as Neil's already said, you know, we've got this wonderful confluence of urban and rural, probably more than any other county in the UK. So, that's a real point of difference."

Matt

"Do you see yourself as a rural business?"

Ian

"Yeah, I do. Probably, yeah. But I think that I think in an urban setting that gives me a point of difference as well. But also making those office holders with us recognise how fortunate we are. Are we? You know, we have a lot of children come from disadvantaged and inner-city areas where they don't get access to green space and just I think reminding everybody that things are not that bad."

Matt

"Do you think keeping the environment front of mind is easier when you're in a sort of farm environment, like it is all around you?"

Ian

"It's so much more. It's so much easier than it was 20 years ago as well, I think. When we started, so I started that journey having worked in the city and trying to reconnect young people and going into schools and trying to stress the importance of connecting youngsters with green space by affiliate, it was it was like I was talking a completely different language. You know that today through a lot of the green agendas with, let's say, Herts Futures, but also the national policies on Environmental Land Management television shows, DARE I say, like Clarkson's farm have really raised the importance of the environmental agenda and that we all have a responsibility. So, I definitely feel like we're pushing at a more open door than we were."

Matt

"So, are you a Clarkson's farm fan?"

Ian

"Do you know, I had to hold my hand up and I wouldn't have said that I was a huge fan, but I've spent 20 years working in that charity space, trying to give more access to young people, I have a few roles in that and he has done an enormous amount of good, so I'm not going to knock it."

Matt

"Good, good. Like Kerry, you're the Chief Sustainability Officer at Lintbells, so the people behind the U-Move pet supplements. So, tell us a bit more about the company. Where did it come from?"

Kerry Doble, Chief Sustainability Officer, Lintbells

"So company was founded 15 years ago, 17 years ago now by two Johns. So, John Howie, who actually works as a Lieutenant and part of the biodiversity at Hertfordshire, so he was one of the cofounders. They saw an opportunity. Other John's dog wasn't walking so well and they developed a pet

supplement, which it actually started with skin. But then the joint supplement grew from there.

“So, a founder-led business based in Hertfordshire that has done massively well through sort of breeding groups, engaged owners, to where it is today.”

Matt

“And what's your role within that? What were you bought in to do so?”

Kerry

“I am Chief Sustainability Officer. It's a role that was kind of self-created, shall I say always the best roles always self-created alongside John, I will say. So I actually joined the business on a contract a couple of years ago in the capacity of Innovation Director. My background is in brands, marketing, product innovation and I saw an opportunity. Basically the values and the ethics of the business. Sort of gave me an insight into...”

Matt

“That was the established values of the business?”

Kerry

“The established values of the business and intrinsically how you know the hearts and minds. And it was very much run like a family-owned business. Saw an opportunity there to sort of push it a little bit further. And used sort of B Corp as we've mentioned. So used B Corp as kind of a skeleton to measure the business and develop.”

Matt

“Are people aware of what a B Corp is? Can you give the picture?”

Kerry

“Absolutely. So B Corp is a certification accreditation which comes through B Lab. So there's B labs all over the place, a social enterprise and you are measured across five key areas. So looking at workers, environment, etcetera, etcetera on your social and environmental standards, essentially. So B Corps are businesses that hold the highest social environmental standards and through governance. So stuff that is actually measured and is accountable.”

Matt

“And it's not an easy thing to achieve, accreditation, is it?”

Kerry

“No. Next! (laugh).”

Matt

“But when you thought, hey, let's go for this. Was it a way to cement those thoughts into the business, or did you think actually we're on a great journey? Surely we can just get the accreditation.”

Kerry

“So the strategy came first. And the strategy was conversation with the exec, and there was a lot of sort

of, I guess, similar conversations, that business have about you know, where do you put the energy? What do you do? And for me? So we talk about green businesses. I would never have looked at myself and gone 'we're a green business', right? So, we're a business that is trying to do some good, and in order to do that, it was really important for me that we looked at the operational effectiveness and efficiency of our business and understood how we could make changes within those cycles in order to be better and not all those changes were mind blowing. Not all of them cost an arm and a leg.

"It was just about sort of taking a slightly different view or just sort of trying to do something slightly differently to what others may have been doing, or to what the norm was. So it started with strategy. B. Corp helped bring the Board around because it gave a platform to be able to measure against. So it was helpful, but we never went after B Corp to get a stamp or to show the world. This is who we are. We went off to be called because we believed in what it stood for and we wanted the business to be doing the right things. B Corp took us 18 months to a certification. So it is something."

"I mean, I worked with a friend of mine in the same in the same space, and he did. Jamie Oliver's business took them through B Corp and Jamie Oliver described it as someone going through his underwear draw (laughs) - it literally is like that. It is a meticulous process and it is created like a rabbit Warren. So what my business will go through is not to the same as what your business will go through and it's interrogating. And what they're looking for is they are looking for businesses to really highlight their passion, their values, their operational change, but also have that grounded in policy, in governance. That means this is something that's going to stick around and something that's going to have a long-standing impact."

Matt

"Lots of companies have strategies, they don't always come off. How do you bring along the team, the people do all the work along that journey?"

Kerry

"So I can't say initially it was easy. You have to find the hearts and the minds so where do people navigate to when you look at people's values? What really makes a difference to them and really sort of dig into that and tap into that. So, you know, at the time I was surrounded by three wonderful execs, John Howie had a massive passion for sort of carbon reduction. He understood the science around that side, Fiona, the current CEO, was really passionate about development with women. Ed and I, etc. and Paul was really big on community and sort of giving back. So, it was really understanding what was motivating them. But then how we actually accelerated and made it work was, you know, a lot of people always say to me, so how big was your team? And I say, well, initially. Me and then I added one other, but actually by the end of it, I had a team of 25, but they didn't report to me.

"So how I operated is I built what may be commonly known through gusto as tribes, we had sleds and I had a sled team that I sort of poached from different areas of the business."

Matt

"Adopting people."

Kerry

"Adopting people, yes. But through voluntary purposes, initially, but then streamlining them into

functional teams that actually, OK. You come from procurement. I can use you here in, in this way etcetera. And those people became my biggest champions and they were the ones that had to lead the change on the floor.

“So you know, navigating that all the way to, you know, by the end of last year, there was a KPI within the business strategy that was down to net zero. There was a KPI within each of the execs roles that they had to work towards. And it was the business, it was the teams that worked beneath them that had KPIs as well because you've got to build it into someone's agenda. It takes passion, but it also takes time, so you know, eventually lining up those dots was what made the real difference.”

Matt

“Now can this make you more money? Can it drive profitability or does it become a cost centre doing these things well?”

Kerry

“Really interesting. What Ian was saying now is ‘first things first’ it's having a business that does good. Drives, engagements, engagement drives productivity. Productivity makes money. So #.1 #2 is absolutely, I mean, when I started to unpick our operational chain, there was stuff that kind of had just been going on for years because no one had gone in to challenge it. No one with a different lens had gone in and gone well, why are we doing that? So you know, within the first year, we managed to extrapolate tons of money out of our packaging purely by saying do we really need this or hello, we can lightweight stuff, we can use more recycled content, we can look at not having you know, 3 outer cartoons. So, you know, really looking in that and saying actually, you know we can, we can invest back. So we remove from the business initially...”

Matt

“And I'm aware that the company was acquired last year. What did the new owners think about the plan and by the time they bought it, had it been embedded in the operation?”

Kerry

“Yeah. So obviously when you're going through sort of deal structures and deal, I sat on the deal team, really exciting time. We came up against a number of what we said strategics and private equity investors etcetera and all of them had a heart for this era of the business. They called out B Corp. B Corp is just something tangible.

“The people understand can hook onto and sort of, you know, get their heads behind. But they all had an interest in how to develop a sustainable business. Now, sustainable business means one that is set up for the future and is going to make money and thrive. But it's also sustainable because it meets certain criteria that are, you know, nature or environmental people orientated. So yes, they did have passion and heart for it. But the one thing that that you know was really important to me and as I kind of alluded to earlier is when we set about putting the strategy in place, for me it was about business change. This wasn't me coming in and saying guys have got a strategy. Let's have it on an 18-month project. We're going to make B Corp happen.

“This was about taking a look over your shoulder and saying OK guys, there's some changes we're gonna make here and it might not be easy and in fact, here's a three and a five-year view of it because

we have to turn this ship. And we're going to do it piece by piece and we're going to learn as you go. But you have to hold hands and you have to make those risks. So by the time the new business came on board, the strategy still remains and the KPIs that we put in place on a longer term basis still remain, but it's embedded into the operational way of the business. So what the business does and how they do things, it is who they are. You can't sort of pull those two bits apart."

Matt

"Lovely to hear.

"Chris. You founded Octopus Investments and later the Octopus Group. Now with businesses around healthcare, Energy ventures, property and wealth, Octopus Energy is now the UK's largest energy provider, supplying one in four UK households, you must be kind of be proud to achieved all of that. Are investments in green industries obviously good for the environment? But can they generate the return?"

Chris Hulatt, Co-Founder of the Octopus Group

"Yeah, absolutely. Before I touch on that though, just want to say we've heard a lot about B Corps this morning Octopus Group became a B Corp about three or four years ago. It's one of the best things we ever did. Our staff, our customers, our shareholders, all really love it. So I'd certainly recommend to anyone out there who's thinking about whether to become a B Corp or if they've been maybe inspired by what they heard from Kerry. Absolutely look it up. It really is a very powerful scheme. It's not easy to get, but I think that's part of the beauty of it."

Matt

"Well, as Kerry was saying, does it give you a framework to try and change your business?"

Chris

"Well, I think absolutely it does because she referred to the kind of five different sort of groupings of topics, and there are things like customers, the environment, the communities you operate in, your staff and your shells. So rather than sitting in the boardroom thinking about just your shareholders, we think about the decisions we take through the lens of those five stakeholder groups and I think it does make for much more interesting, much more balanced decision making and I really believe if you run your business thinking about those five groups then in the long run you'll build a valuable successful business. Just don't obsess about your profitability every single day. Think about those wider objectives. So do look up B Corp."

"Your question though was about..."

Matt

"When you see, sort of run your investment business when you were sort of sitting in your in your front room after leaving your company, I guess 2000 with your Co-founders, were green issues at the top of top of your agenda, and you're trying to raise that first bit of money?"

Chris

"Not back, then back then our fix was very much on raising some money to back UK early-stage companies to do some venture capital, to do some smaller company investing. For us, renewables came along in about 2011. One of my colleagues came stood at my desk and he said solar farms are

starting to be built in the UK. We should be doing that, and I remember thinking, don't be so mad. That's a crazy idea. What do we know about solar farms? But he kept coming back day after day and after a couple of weeks, myself and Simon, the other founder, thought why don't we give a go? And so we said to Matt, OK, see what you can do, start building a team.

"Today, Matt runs a team of about 150 people. We've built solar and wind farms in the UK, but also much further afield. I think renewable expertise has been a real success story for the UK through Octopus, but also many other companies in this field.

"Neil referred to RES earlier, and his in his remarks, I was in Australia a week ago visiting our team down there. We built a really big solar wind farm in the middle of nowhere in Queensland that was actually developed by RES. So, you can see Hertfordshire expertise spreading out around the world. It's a real success story."

Matt

"And that solar farm - there was no government subsidies for it, were there?"

Chris

"No, that was built with pension fund money from Australian pension funds, but also from the UK. We have a big team in Australia now that's building that, but to me the opportunity in renewables is both large scale things, things like offshore wind where the UK is the world leader probably - no point in dwelling on that today in the Hertfordshire webinar (laughs), but there is a lot that is going on in Hertfordshire and I think the future is going to be driven by lots of community scale renewables projects and when you go and ask communities, would you be interested in having a small solar farm carefully located in a field, you know at the end of the village? You might think if you read the media that no one wants this. Actually thousands of communities around the country, including lots in Hertfordshire, have come to us to say they would really welcome this kind of thing and our job is really to match up land owners and communities where there's opportunity to do this and this has a real opportunity to benefit people through locally produced energy that should be cheaper for people to access.

"We've tested this out over the years with something called the Fan Club where we've said to communities living near some of our wind farms 'if you live within a five mile radius and that Wind farm is generating, you can benefit from access to cheaper electricity' people really like this concept makes people feel part of something.

"I think the real problem with net zero is when people feel it's being done to them rather than them being part of it. So by engaging communities in the concept of building renewable power generation near to their homes, explaining why that can benefit them in terms of lower pricing, then I think actually we do have something that people can really get behind."

Matt

"I mean, you touch on that, obviously there's sort of lim bees. There's change. Don't any change to happen in my back garden. The government grappling with changing the way that things will go through or won't do you think it is trying to find out different ways to engage with communities, to

partner with them, because it can be quite scary. Big organisation pops up next door to go 'hey, we're going to be doing this'."

Chris

"Well. That's what I think it has to be done in conjunction with the community rather than done to them. And that means working out where there is real appetite. It's showcasing the benefits that this can bring. I think maybe Aaron Street 10 years ago was guilty of saying, right, we're going to build something over there and we're going to give you a new swing for the park. And that was just totally missing the point of what community engagement should be all about. It has to be so much more powerful than that. The country as a whole is clearly going through a journey. There's national level changes needed to particularly drive things like the grid connection so on, but the real benefit of smaller scale projects is they don't need the same huge and the size of the grid connection. They can be done much more quickly. They don't. They don't need the same large wires to connect them, and they can make a difference to communities really quickly."

Matt

"Obviously, Octopus Group is lots of different companies. How do you how do you push through or encourage your teams to think about the environment, to think about sustainability within the work that they do? I think it is also one that your colleagues also asking them to make some money as well."

Chris

"Yeah, absolutely. But I think it's really embedded in the mindset. Partially it's the B Corp that kind of phenomena. I think it goes further than that if I think of the kind of investors that we engage with, they are individuals but also pension funds from here and around the world. These people do care about what their money is deployed into. They also want it to earn a return, but I think it's about showing people that sectors like renewable energy, like affordable housing, like building what we call zero build homes. These are essentially housing projects which are designed from scratch to make sure they generate so much power they are so efficient and so well insulated and by using things like solar panels and batteries and so on, that can operate without incurring people any energy bill over the course of a year. These are things that people want to invest into, and hopefully they are better products that people want to engage with too. Do people want to live in a really warm home that isn't going to cost them anything to run? Yeah, I think they should do."

"So, this is where there's an opportunity for partnership between, I think, local government, house builders and providers of capital to work together to accelerate our ability in this country to build this type of modern housing that people want. You know it's good for the environment, but it will also lead to better outcomes for people too."

Matt

"Are there techniques or strategies to get it's coming to your group? Get other companies to engage with other things we should do as a country to incentivise more of this kind of ESG behaviour?"

Chris

"Yeah, maybe ESG become a bit of a sort of overused phrase and certainly across the Atlantic, our friends will say it's now quite a toxic phrase. I think that's perhaps not quite the case, but maybe the pendulum has swung a little bit too far to people being obsessed with ESG. It's clearly still really

important. So I said people want their capital to, I think do some good, but have a sensible return. Where maybe there are things that we could do better.

"I think it's about joining up businesses with opportunities for to take, to take their business into a new direction. If you're a plumbing or electrical company, for example, are you thinking hard about what your business might need to look like in five years' time? With the advent of things like, you know, batteries and people's garages or, heat pumped. We're going to need in this country 10s and 10s of thousands of heat pump engineers. Where are they going to come from?"

"These are great jobs that will last for decades, but we need to be inspiring our young people now to think, oh, that could be a route that they can go down. So I think joining up opportunities for training, helping point businesses and direct them where the future is going to be and I think also making clear where there is opportunities for this training to maybe be sourced through local authorities through our through our amazing network of cultures then I think that can all work really well to tell us to go."

Matt

"Neil. Should there's an opportunity to hop on these changes and make Hertfordshire the home of this training and development?"

Neil

"Absolutely. Again, none of this is unique to Hertfordshire, but you think of the scale we're just talking about the amount of houses that need build. But even just looking at the retrofit agenda, there's enough demand..."

Matt

"Can you explain what that is?"

Neil

"If people aren't really well, that is essentially, you know, existing houses that are having to kind of be adapted to become lower carbon, essentially so whether it's use of heat pumps, solar, etcetera. So you know, if you think the amount of housing stock we've got in in Hertfordshire, that demand alone will decry thousands of jobs.

"So for an organisation like ours, it's work as Chris has identified, it's working with the FE Colleges. You know what access do they need to kit that enables people to be trained on those new technologies? How do we work in terms of influencing national government in terms of incentivising training provision in that area? We do things a lot of training programmes and things like skills boot camps, which are all about getting people to sort of taste different things, so understand a bit more about how it could work in in, in the particular sector and learn new skills.

"So there's lots of things that we can do in terms of joining that up, because I think Chris is right rather than sticking it in a box and saying that this is all about, you know, sustainability, this is about a business opportunity at the end of the day. And I know particularly SMEs that you know they have lots of issues, so you know it's on organisations like us and our local authority partners to help kind of de-risk that in any way, shape or form or give them the capacity and guidance and help. And again, you know, it's things like we've got Helen, who's our, she's our [Clean Growth Manager](#). We've got a role

within our organisation, so you know, she'll be on the website in terms of details. So people like that are there to help people along the way because I think a lot of this can almost feel as if it passes you by, but I think a lot of it is really tangible and we have to make sure that people can understand that the opportunity is there in a very clear and simple way.

"And there's still more to be done there. But again, if you think of the assets from the skills providers from the university, from people like Red, we've got, we've got all of those component parts. I think we just need to get the toolbox a bit more aligned and then go out to businesses, stakeholders, etcetera and demystify some of this to them. So I thought kind of just breaking those two things in into two areas and translating it in terms of what it actually means to you, your business, et cetera, we need to do a bit more in relation to that, but again, I think we've got, we've got the basis for doing that in Hertfordshire, probably better than other places in the country."

Matt

"Kerry is, do you think it's like a common challenge to actually to communicate the benefits to (business) communities?"

Kerry

"I don't think it's communicating the benefits. It's a bit of what Chris is saying now. You know, people use this, you know, acronym, ESG. That was a financial framework, right? And we use it and we talk about it and it sounds so scary. It sounds like it's something that is being done to us. You know, if you come back to sustainability, as I say, you know, people always want to build sustainable businesses. We're just changing what that means and what that looks like. And it's really important to factor in. We talk a lot about green and we talk a lot about net zero etcetera and all these big terms when people start to talk about nature, that becomes a little bit more tactile, a little bit more, something that I can understand. However, we forget about the social impact that all of this has. So it's that triangle of bringing together, reducing our emissions, reducing our impact that we're having. Sort of increasing biodiversity, creating that chain that moves again and reinvigorating nature, but having the impact on the ground for people as well and that's where we could really dial up what we're doing and how we're demonstrating the benefits, because it'll help all of us and the futures to come."

Matt

"Chris, I think your investments are about 16/17 billion at the moment for the operation so question for you. I've got some opportunities here. What should we prioritise? The answer can't be all of them! So investing in green infrastructure, incentivising businesses to adopt greener practices, and we've talked about that or focused or focusing on growing a specifically green sector?"

Chris

"As opposed to me actually, maybe slightly ducking your question (laughs), but I think green infrastructure actually there is capital out there. There's no shortage of capital in the world. The world's pension funds, insurance companies and so on want to put their money to work in building real assets that can last for decades. So building renewable energy, there is capital out there to do that.

"I think the real challenge for an area like Hertfordshire is how do we help all of our businesses think about sustainability in a way that does not make them feel they're being pushed into doing this, or ordered to or, but actually because it can help them build a better strong business so it's well placed for

the future. So what are the ingredients to do that? I think it is access to the right type of training, access to knowledge. It's trying to demystify things. There's so many myths about adoption of new technologies - EVs have suffered for years over the range anxiety that I think is actually a rapidly turning out to be much less of an issue than people might have thought.

"How can we help businesses across the county do some of the easy wins? The solar panels on rooftops the, you know the heat pumps to heat the building. Electrifying fleets. If these are things that can be done now, these are not technologies for future, but they need awareness. They might need financing and they needed a little bit of hand holding. But I think every business can play its part in this. It's about better lives, whether that's for workers, for consumers, for residents, and I think every business can play a role in that."

Matt

"Ian, what do you think about that from the businesses that you start working with you on the farm? Do you think they're on the journey? Got the right knowledge base?"

Ian

"I probably I'd had to hold my hands up and say I don't know where each individual example is on their strategy is on these things. What I do know is they're really interested in the journey that we're going down and the direction that we're on to try and achieve net zero in an agriculture business that, you know, large machinery and everything else and an understanding that actually it hasn't. You know, it hasn't been meant a quantum shift in in a product that we're trying to deliver. It's just it really has been a mind, a mindset piece and what Chris is saying. Is that within that grasp or what they can do for their business?"

"You know, I was sat with a group of business owners recently and you know, one person said 'Well, you know, we're doing our bit, we're buying reusable coffee pods' and I think hum, you need to do a bit more! But it is difficult, you know, for many, for business like ours it it's all there. It's just, and it's all, you know, our wins are very easy to record and very easy to shout about. So, but I would certainly say that each and every one of our businesses, whether they're financial advisors or whether they're a head office for, for a franchise, they're all trying to find ways of (because they recognise it) It's what incentivises their teams and their customers as well."

Matt

"I'm just kind of thinking about money and investments, obviously got things like the National Wealth Fund. There's section 106 getting developers to support changes. Neil. What should be leading into all of those things? Should we be thinking about where some of the money comes from?"

Neil

"Yes, in short, I think the challenge is again working across sort of public sector partners is getting the right amount of advice in order to navigate some of that.

"So again, even things like the National Wealth Fund, it's just understanding what the kind of what the kind of remit of that is in terms of what the rules in terms of accessibility are.

“So I think there is that I think sort of common theme of the day is called de-jargonising. Some of this stuff, because I think a lot of this stuff, we tend to just stick it in a box and call it environmental sustainability. And that I think if we just focus on efficiency, that's really what's driving it. It's new technology to make life more efficient and therefore save us money. Reduce risk, yeah. And so, you know, I was guilty just earlier of talking about retrofit again. That's just using jargon. Essentially it's making homes more efficient and therefore saving people money.

“And so I think in relation to some of the bigger infrastructure, I think there are there are challenges in Hertfordshire. Again, I talked about some of those growth locations. I talked about, you know, the fact that we've got issues around transport congestion. Hertfordshire is a great place to if you're going north or South, but getting east West is very difficult. But what we need to think about is the use of that new technology and how the adaptation of that new technology can solve a problem that we historically have thought about a different solution, because I think that's where the opportunities are in places like Hertfordshire that, as Chris has said, that it's inherently an investable proposition in Hertfordshire, you know when we put bids into government historically, but that return on investment you get, it's not a case of you know we're dealing with a massive market failures. It's about a bit of coalescence, a bit of public intervention can help accelerate something that wouldn't happen in in a normal sort of time frame. That's the space of things running Hertfordshire.

“So to your point, I think there's more we can do and we, you know, in Hertfordshire Futures were looking at using some of our investment funds in terms of what's the kind of calibration we need to put to them to in terms of prioritise what we think we should be investing in and then go out to government and say, 'well, what can you co-invest with us on?' But I think it's about getting that level of understanding of - so we're to Chris's point, you know, he knows where the markets are. He knows what they're motivated with in terms of the public sector. It's about some of that translation navigation to see, well, how can we broker those conversations? How can they possibly be interested in things like Herts IQ from an investment point of view in some of those key sites that we want to develop?”

Matt

“(To audience) If you've got some questions, remember you can pop them in the teams chat and I'll try and get to them towards the end. Also, we talked about sort of infrastructure issues, Data centres, which is seen as sort of critical national infrastructure as two very large centres planned. One at Maxwell's farm for Google I think, and DCO 1 next to the South Mims roundabout. There's lots of discussion about what they can do for areas, isn't there?”

Chris

“Yeah, absolutely. I suppose the whole AI revolution, the need for data centres, has been very well publicised recently. I think as a country, we need to make sure we embrace this. We don't get left behind, but there's also then decisions on a local level about where should these things be sited? How do we make sure they get access to enough power? Enough water, enough land? And those are difficult choices, particularly in a, you know, a congested, crowded part of the UK, like Hertfordshire. But I do think there are real economic benefits that come from data centres. You get a bit of an ecosystem of tech companies that can evolve in the area, but I also think we need to be really joined up and coordinated and careful with how we make sure we're accessing the resources and how we benefit from the location of data centres.

"One of the things that our team's Octopus is doing is partnering with an emerging company that is trying to think of ways of using the cooling water that's been heated in a data centre and trying to pre-locate swimming pools, leisure centres next to these data centres so that that warm water can have, rather than just being dumped, can have another purpose. It's kind of clever things like that to reduce the operating costs and reduce the overall environmental impact of data centres, I think will help the public to embrace them more."

Matt

"It's a channel, isn't it? Thinking about some of these technologies can look quite scary from an environmental perspective and it's necessary for growth, but at the same time, can we get any benefits from them?"

Chris

"I think one of the big themes we've talked about this morning is getting that balance right between economic growth and the environment and saying it's not about one or the other. About trying to figure out the right way to tackle both of these at the same time, there's a clear need for the private sector to work with the public sector on this. The National Wealth fund. National government, local authorities, local government, both a real need, I think, for the public sector to help do the really hard things that are not economically viable and help kick start technology of the future. We saw this ourselves in 2011. The first solar farms we built only were possible because of large amounts of something called a 'feed-in tariff' for technologies of the future. They will need some support from the public sector to kick start them to the point where the private sector can then take over, which is why, if so many things rely on this close cooperation between the public and private sector."

Matt

"OK, some questions from the audience. Ian, how do we engage landowners and farm owners in the local Nature recovery strategy? What incentives need to be in place?"

Ian

"Good question. Right. So there's quite a lot of engagement going on within the local nature recovery strategy. It's, you know, it's a relatively new piece of work. So at the moment, what we're what we're seeing to make change, we're seeing a move away from the support that we used to get from Brussels. Michael Gove brought in a scheme called the Environmental Land Management Scheme. So it's all acronyms and at the moment this government has made a commitment to the end of this Parliament for something called the 'Sustainable Farming Incentive' so when we've got, we've got that going on, which is basically, so we've seen a lot of direct support moving into what we call 'public money for public good' which I'm very supportive of because there are, we need to look after our biodiversity and habitats and I'm sorry to say, like Chris just said, if there isn't some help, some public support there, I think a lot of farmers, when times are tough, they might retrench a bit.

"Nature Recovery we've also with the development that Neil spoken about, there's a lot of work that will. We've got 10% of our land holdings will have to go into biodiversity, net gain. So we've got quite a large amount of land that will be taken up in there and then the natural capital piece. So the government's made a commitment to 30% of the land by in an environment committed to the environment by 20-30, so 30 by 30. So there's all these different sort of bits of work going on, plus we've got commitments to

carbon and should we be, you know, should farmers and land owners be on in some carbon scheme and they all slightly clash.

“And at the moment I think carbon, someone described it to me quite recently, it's like you know and knowing which carbon scheme to go with, it's like trying to nail something to jelly and I, you know, I've been in the carbon market now for five years and I probably feel like I know less about it now than when I signed up, it was really movable, so to tell people where we're going with our local nature recovery strategy in amongst that is really, really difficult. What we do know is we know from the Hertfordshire Nature Report, we know that we have got a lot of declining species we know which species are under threat. We also know that we have, you know, 20% of species, we have, but we have also seen some growths of various bird species.

“We've also seen a lot of work done in the chalk streams in Hertfordshire, of which we have a probably, I think, a far greater concentration of chalk streams in Hertfordshire than any other county apart from maybe Hampshire.”

Matt

“I think we're at 10% of the country here, yeah.”

Ian

“So it's, you know, Yeah. So it's, you know, we've got to make sure we look after those habitats. And so I think what we can't do is we can't expect farmers to look after these vital and incredibly valuable natural habitats without any public support, you know or private support. There needs to be a framework that farmers can see that that actually they're in it for the for the whole of society and not, it's not an obligation. It's something that we're all in together.”

Matt

“Neil. I think you're going to be stuck with questions to people being unhappy about things (soft laughs) So we'll fire these at you, and you can do your do your best. How can half share reduce air pollution whilst it's still building new homes?”

Neil

“Again, I think air pollution is predominantly as a result of well, I think transport car use is a very good example of the biggest contribution to air pollution. We compared to other places we probably don't have the best EV infrastructures, but if this whole thing about moving people from petrol/diesel engines to EV that only works if you've got the infrastructure in place to enable people to feel as if they can charge their cars and drive around Hertfordshire because we have a lot of net commuting in and around Hertfordshire, so intra-net commuting in Hertfordshire, so I think, for example, that would have a have a significant impact.”

Matt

“Do you think there's opportunities around getting staff on to environmental awareness training and courses from the county?”

Neil

“I think there is. I guess we'd have to be careful in terms of, you know what, what they would be. They'd

have to have a focus and a purpose and I'm because I'm aware there are already sort of, lots of information out there, I think as we kind of talked about today is that it's that distilling of information and signposting and that kind of it's not just information, it's advice. So again, I think one of our takeaways in terms of the team like Hertfordshire Futures, we do better at providing signposting and information and using organisations we work with, such as Get Enterprising, the Growth Hub that are kind of the interface with businesses. How we make sure that that level advice is permeated through that kind of mainstream support. That we provide, as an organisation."

Matt

"Someone who suggested that perhaps maybe other counties in East of England have more incentives for renewable energy generation. Chris, is there anything we should be stealing from other places that we think are great ideas?"

Chris

"I think what really kills renewable projects is long time periods and big delays to get planning and to get good connections so, working really closely to make sure that it's clear where there's an opportunity to get a good connection and it's clear where a county wants renewables to be cited and where communities deals I talked about earlier, then I think you can really shorten the time scale to get things done and that reduces the cost of capital. Essentially, it makes it a more viable project and more things will get built and in the long run that would be good for everyone. It will lower electricity prices.

"It's the direction we got to go and so we need the developers, the providers, capital and local authorities to work closely together. If you can get that really super coordinated, it can make a big difference."

Matt

"Just a quick thought from each of you on what you would say to businesses that may be thinking more about this journey or things that they can do to grind about their business."

Kerry

"Start somewhere. You know, doing something is worth more than you know, just sort of denial. And you know, as Chris said earlier, that there's stuff that you can do. Just look at your waste. Look at the recycling. And say to yourself, you know, are we segregating our waste enough that there's, you know? Changing your light bulbs to ones that are more, you know, friendly. They're buying more recycling content. This stuff that you can do now, don't wait. Don't. Don't wait for a big strategy or big plan.

"Just do something."

Matt

"Ian?"

Ian

"I think probably stealing a bit of what Kerry is saying, but just engage everybody in the team because I think everybody has to be committed to it and you never know where your ideas are going to come from."

Chris

"I would certainly say try to do the easy wins, things like EV sacrifice leasing schemes, which many businesses offer can be a way for your staff to access EVs more easily. And I'd also just encourage people to look hard at some of these myths and really challenge yourself to actually see what is in the land of the possible today rather than maybe what might be in the case five or ten years ago."

Matt

"Neil, what can people do to contribute to the strategy and what would you like to leave in people's minds?"

Neil

"I think picking up from the previous comments from our organisation is - how can we help individuals and business make that journey/take that first step? So, I think there's a lot of work we can and should be doing more on, in terms of demystifying some of this in terms of simplifying the opportunities that are patently available.

"And what I'm what I'm keen to do is that this isn't an adjunct to the Economic Strategy that it's embedded in it and so we need to go away from this conversation and make sure the strategy is not just focused on sustainability issues as a kind of nice thing to do, but it's central to it. So that's my takeaway."

Matt

"Great. Thank you very much and thank you to our guests, Neil, Ian, Kerry and Chris. This was the second of three debates. There's a third one on AI soon. Check out the website for more information and to register there. And also, thank you for joining us.

Goodbye."