



#futuregen

Lessons from a Small Country

By Jane Davidson

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‘This book is being published at an extraordinary time. Across much of the world, Covid-19, an invisible killer, is stalking our lives – and our way of life... In the interests of future generations, when this threat is over, there will be an opportunity to capitalise on our rediscovered kindness and sense of society, to celebrate the importance of nature, to build on our increased virtual engagement to act on that other silent killer – climate change – for the benefit of current and future generations.’ – Jane Davidson

One woman who is not failing the future generation is former member of the Nation Assembly for Wales, Jane Davidson. As Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing in Wales, Jane proposed the ‘Well-being of Future Generations Act’, drawing the attention of the world. At the launch of the Act, the UN Assistant Secretary General, Nikhil Seth, commented ‘What Wales is doing today, the world will do tomorrow’.

In *#futuregen*, Jane Davidson reveals what governments, policy makers and activists around the world can learn from the creation and implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, and the strong vision put forward by this small, ground-breaking nation.

Wales, one of the first industrialised countries based on coal, iron and steel industries, has had to envision a new future. The Well-being of Future Generations Act has helped Wales discover opportunities in its vast natural beauty, harnessing its renewable energy resources and its strong communities – showing the many opportunities for a bright and prosperous future for generations to come.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act places sustainability at the heart of government, and requires long-term, collaborative systemic solutions to complex issues including poverty, health, ecology, environment and meaningful employment in the interests of current and future generations. In response to the many lines of interest that her work has aroused, this book is written as both a memoir, and a handbook for change. Already, in the UK, Lord John Bird and Caroline Lucas are leading a Future Generation Act through Parliament and governments in New Zealand, Iceland, Finland, Canada and Gibraltar are looking at the Welsh experiment with interest. The story of how the Act came into being is an important case study showing how sustainability can be at the heart of present-day policy. Now, more than ever, we need powerful examples such as *#futuregen*, that will guide campaigners, local elected members, national politicians and civic leaders as a way forward in the fight for a sustainable future.

‘Be inspired by this fascinating story of how Wales made into law the obligation for a country to pursue sustainable development, on behalf of future generations.’

– Gro Harlem Brundtland

‘As the effects of climate change and ecological degradation become ever more apparent it is not despair that must drive us, but action. Jane Davidson’s wonderful #futuregen tells the inspiring story of how one country stepped up with just that, through a ground-breaking new law to protect the interests of future generations. For those searching for hope, this is a must read.’

– Tony Juniper CBE, Environmentalist



About the Author

Jane Davidson is Pro Vice-Chancellor Emeritus at the University of Wales which has embedded the Well-being of Future Generations' Act into all its activities. Jane has won a number of UK wide awards for this work. From 2007- 2011, Jane was Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing in Wales where she proposed legislation to make sustainable development its central organising principle – the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which came into law in April 2015. She created a Welsh Climate Change Commission and Future Generations Commissioner, the 800 mile Wales coastal path, legislated on waste which has seen Wales become one of the top recycling countries in the world. She introduced the first UK charge on carrier bags, leading the way for similar charges across the UK. Jane is a patron of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and Tools for Self Reliance Wales (TFSR Cymru). She holds honorary fellowships from WWF, CIW (Chartered Institute of Waste), CIWEM (Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management). She is Chair of the RSA in Wales and an associate faculty member at Harvard University. She lives on a 10 acre smallholding in west Wales where she tries to live a low carbon life, growing organically as much food as possible.

Examples of The Future Generations Act in Wales

Supporting local public space: Wrexham Council supported the creation of 'Ty Pawb' – which was a covered market owned by the Council, in need of refurbishment and losing trade. With long-term thinking, collaborative working and involving local people, they have supported the re-creation of the building as an arts and cultural centre and, through involving local people and businesses, they have created a space which is a street-food market, marketplace, gallery, arts and crafts school, cinema and more – providing multiple benefits for the town centre and local economy and people

Zero Waste: the 'Zero Waste Wales' agenda was started by my colleague Sue Essex AM, Environment Minister in 2003 who oversaw the first sustainable development scheme, 'Learning to Live Differently'. When the National Assembly for Wales started in 1999, Wales had a 3 per cent recycling rate with 97 per cent waste going to landfill. In 2009, I worked with the local authorities to introduce statutory municipal recycling targets, leading to 70 per cent by 2025 and zero waste by 2050. These have forced local authorities to deliver or be fined. In the second quarter of 2019, 67 per cent of municipal waste was reused/recycled/composted, a 2 per cent increase on the same quarter of 2018, and the highest quarterly rate to date, enabling Wales to overtake Germany to be best in the world.

'Regenerating our City for Wellbeing and Wildlife': an ambitious plan for Swansea, which is the second-biggest city in Wales and a coastal city - to become greener and more resilient to climate change, with fewer hard surfaces, using nature to provide space for wildlife, bring people pleasure and offer an improved experience for visitors and traders. The plan proposes new green infrastructure to provide an opportunity for nature to be brought into the heart of the city to widen its appeal to residents and visitors. This will bring benefits such as boosting biodiversity and improving climate change resilience.

M4 Relief Road: Since 1991, business organisations in Wales have sought to build a new fourteen-mile, six-lane motorway as a gateway into south-east Wales from England in a bid to tackle the congestion faced by motorists. Three times the decision was deferred by Economy Ministers on the grounds of cost (c. £1.4 billion) and adverse effects on the environment. Following a formal planning inquiry which recommended support, the First Minister of Wales refused to give his consent, saying the project would have an adverse impact on wildlife, sites of special scientific interest and historic landscapes and that in his judgement the environmental concerns outweigh the road's advantages, not least since the capital cost was eye-wateringly high. Subsequently, he specifically referenced the Act and the government's declaration of a climate emergency as reasons underpinning his decision. Environmentalists – including me - were delighted!