**New hope for Britain as well as the USA?**

By Stephen Burke, Director, United for All Ages

The inauguration of a new President of the United States of America is always a defining moment. In 2021 it could not come at a more important time for the USA or the rest of the world.

In the UK, the last nine months have been filled with talk of Covid-19 providing an opportunity to re-set our social and economic priorities, policies and programmes.

Covid has amplified deep-seated inequalities and divisions, with the greatest impact being experienced by people on low incomes and with poor health, BAME communities, women, children and young people. All told, it demonstrates why we need radical reforms not a mere re-set.

Across the board our economic and social policies have been proven lacking. At the same time the role of government at all levels has been paramount in tackling the health and economic challenges posed by Covid.

In the USA, President-elect Joe Biden has already promised a 1.9 trillion dollar package to heal the Covid damage.

What is needed in the UK is a similarly ambitious effort, at least equal to that which rebuilt post-World War II Britain. Not just a new Beveridge creating the NHS and welfare state, but also reinventing the worlds of education, work and technology and reflecting the changing ways we live from travel and communication to our homes and neighbourhoods. All within the context of some of our biggest challenges from ageing to climate crisis.

What might underpin such a new approach to our society? Principles of equality, access and universality must be central, and new policies must work for people of all ages and in the longer term for future generations. Covid has also shown that we need to focus much more on prevention and early intervention, and invest in our communities and relationships to support interdependence and promote wellbeing. Genuine power and control must be devolved to the grassroots. Finally, ambition – this is not a time for tinkering, but for acting at scale and enabling massive change in all communities.

Ten areas crying out for radical reform are:

* **Health and care** – putting prevention first, managing risks and planning for ageing, pandemics and tech, properly resourced with individuals and families at their heart
* **Education and learning** – starting with the early years, learning should be the first priority, supporting all young people, investing in future generations and across the life course
* **Homes and neighbourhoods** – building hundreds of thousands of affordable homes while building neighbourhoods with shared spaces and facilities for people of all ages
* **Business and work** – some businesses have flourished during the pandemic, working lives have improved for many - we now need to ensure that the world of business is transformed
* **Town centres and councils** – local government has a real chance to shape the places where we live and increasingly hang out, reimagining high streets and town centres for all ages
* **Infrastructure** – do we need high speed rail and all its costs? Or could the funding be used to ensure digital access for all, in our homes and communities, along with better local transport?
* **Security and cyber** – our place in the world will depend on trading relationships with other countries and the effectiveness of our communications and defence against cyber attacks
* **Economy and welfare** – our economy and support systems need to work for everyone, giving all families security, supporting success and based on fairer taxation of wealth and income
* **Culture, sport and arts** – often poorly funded, these are the bedrock and glue of our communities and society, where many shared experiences and common bonds occur
* **Democracy and truth** – the divisions in our society will only be healed when we listen to and respect each other, a process that our leaders and media must initiate and live out

This is not a small agenda. But we live in the most unusual of times. If we can’t act now, when will we change our society for the better?

And it’s an agenda that is pressing for all of us. In particular it must be about creating a Britain for all ages, with a better future for our children and young people. Whatever we do, we must ensure that the outcomes are intergenerationally fair for current and future generations.

Never forget what was said well before Joe Biden was elected President: we don’t inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.

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