

Dear Colleague,

The future work of the Sustainable Development Commission

On the 22nd June, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made a statement to the House of Commons in which she confirmed Defra's decision to withdraw funding from the SDC in London from the end of this financial year.

This is a great disappointment for us after ten years work to help embed sustainable development in the heart of Government, but we have been very heartened by the significant response from so many who are committed to sustainable development, including other parts of Government, NGOS, the media, and other organisations and individuals both here in the UK and further afield.

It is important to note that the statement also contained a commitment that the two Secretaries of State at Defra and DECC now intend to take the lead directly on sustainable development in Government:

"The Government is committed to delivering sustainable development and becoming the greenest government ever, promoting economic development, environmental protection and an improving quality of life for everyone in the UK. We want to mainstream sustainability, strengthen the Government's performance in this area and put processes in place to join-up activity across government much more effectively."

In a meeting with the Secretary of State, we have been very clear that we think the decision about the SDC is a short sighted one which will cost a great deal more than it saves, and that the removal of an body one step removed from Government departments will make the job of mainstreaming sustainable development significantly harder. Nevertheless, given the commitments above we also discussed what the SDC's ten years of research and experience can offer to Defra and DECC as they take this work forward, and the sorts of support we think may be needed if this initiative is to succeed.

The SDC has always worked UK wide, and indeed is now a company and public body jointly owned by the four governments. As yet, the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have yet to decide how they wish to take sustainable development forward, and therefore what role they see for the SDC itself. Options exist for a continued role for the SDC as a body that continues to serve these three governments, or for bespoke organisations in Wales and Scotland to provide SD advice, scrutiny and support.

Despite all the above, it is clear that we are going to have to bring the work of the Whitehall office of SDC to a close by the end of the financial year. We are committed to delivery of a work programme for 2010/11, including our funded commitments to the Departments of Health and of Education. We are working to support our staff in looking for new work, and also looking at how we can create a lasting legacy and preserve the networks, reports and knowledge built up by the SDC and its two predecessors across these last sixteen years.

Finally, I want to end by saying how heartening it has been to receive so many offers of support and best wishes and to see how many people care about the future of sustainable development in the UK. The Coalition Government is dealing with a challenging financial climate, wrestling with climate change, and trying to turn around increasing levels of insecurity. We firmly believe that sustainable development is the only lasting framework by which to tackle these issues both for today's citizens and for future generations.

In 2012, the UK Government will attend the next Earth Summit, reporting on progress. We want to wish Defra and DECC well in taking forward this commitment to mainstream sustainable development, and note their call for a wider set of organisations to hold it to account. The critical friend role we have been privileged to exercise within Government is a baton which now needs to be passed to each and every individual and organisation that cares about sustainable development, wants to help Government to succeed, but is also prepared to hold it to account if it is failing,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Andrew Lee', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andrew Lee

Chief Executive.