



Virtual Museum reworks Domestic Design exhibition

MARJORIE HARRIS

One of the most pleasing and interesting aspects of being part of the Suburb community has to be the fact that we are surrounded by buildings designed by many of the finest architects of the early 20th century, brought together to form a pleasant and harmonious environment in which to live and work.

In Autumn 2021 HGS Trust and Suburb Archives put on an exhibition at Fellowship House – Elements of Domestic Design: Building Hampstead Garden Suburb (1907-1939) – featuring 15 of the Suburb’s architects of domestic buildings.

Now, in partnership with the HGS Heritage Virtual Museum, the exhibition has been reworked so that it can be viewed in the museum

by people anywhere in the world at www.hgsheritage.org.uk. One of the founders’ core reasons for creating the Virtual Museum was to showcase the Suburb’s unique built environment for architectural

professionals, students, historians, residents and anybody interested in housing and the Garden City Movement, so this is a major step forward.

The domestic architects, featured with histories of their lives and careers and with illustrations of the houses they designed, range from Michael Bunney to GG Winbourne. Aside from personal information about each of the architects, the Trust and Suburb Archives have used the display panels to illustrate how house design was shaped by rapidly shifting cultural and economic circumstances, particularly after the First World War, and to highlight even the lesser-known architects’ contribution to the holistic townscape so integral to Hampstead Garden Suburb.



Photos: HGS Trust



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Net Zero!

JONATHAN WAXMAN

The earth’s atmosphere is almost entirely nitrogen (78%) and oxygen (21%) but also contains other gases (principally carbon dioxide) in fairly small quantities that act like a blanket round the earth keeping our climate warmer than we ‘deserve’ given our distance from the sun. Without these so called ‘greenhouse gases’ earth would be around about -15C on average – whereas it is actually around +15C. Useful!

Increasing the atmospheric content of greenhouse gases is like turning up the thermostat on the earth and would have a significant impact on the stable climate humanity has enjoyed for the last 10,000 years – adding power and frequency to storms, melting ice caps and glaciers which raises sea-levels, making extreme heat events more likely and so creating desertification.

Which gases are greenhouse gases and how do they behave? The main one is carbon dioxide (CO2) and the really hard thing about CO2 is that it is very stable in the atmosphere and from the point of view of a human lifespan it stays there forever. We add CO2 to the atmosphere by burning stuff – mostly gas in our boilers and power stations, petrol in our cars, coal for power and wood. If you think of the atmosphere as a bath tub, we are effectively filling the tub with the plug in, so there is nowhere for the CO2 to go. The level just keeps rising.

The next most powerful contributor to warming is methane (CH4). We also call it gas or natural gas. Methane is a good news, bad news story. The good news is that it decays much more quickly in the atmosphere – half is gone within 10 years and it sort of carries on decaying away – although it just decays into more carbon dioxide! The bad news is that it is a much more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide and over a 20 year horizon it has a warming impact, tonne for tonne, that is 87 times that of CO2. So it is powerful stuff. Methane is added to the atmosphere from the extraction and use of natural gas (especially from fracking where leaks are substantial), from agriculture (mostly cattle but also rice) but also and worryingly from natural reserves that were frozen and have started leaking as we have warmed the earth.

In 1962, when I was born, CO2 concentration was 315ppm (parts per million). It is now 418 ppm. In 1962, methane concentration was 1250 ppb. It is now above 1900 ppb. As a result, global average temperature has risen by around 1°C already. Scientists tell us that we should keep total warming to well below 2°C in order to maintain a safe climate for humanity, and ideally limit warming to 1.5°C.

Returning to the bathtub, it is clear that if we want to stop the level rising we need to turn the tap off and, if possible, take the plug out. That is basically what ‘net zero’ means – stopping the level rising. Ideally we would stop the emission of all greenhouse gases into the atmosphere by stopping burning fossil fuels entirely. This cannot be done overnight as it will require substantial changes across our lives. However, we can probably steadily achieve this for 80-90% of all fossil fuel uses by 2050.

We will generate electricity from carbon free sources such as solar, wind power and nuclear energy. We can use that electricity to generally power our lives. There are, however, some areas where it seems for the moment difficult to stop using fossil fuels. For those last ‘hard to abate’ sectors, that is where the ‘net’ in ‘net zero’ comes in. The hope is that we will develop technologies to either capture carbon emissions at source or simply remove the carbon dioxide directly from the air. And we will try to balance the last remaining emissions with those carbon removal techniques so they net out to zero.

The UK, along with 130 other countries, has committed to becoming net zero by 2050. We are on track but have a long way to go.

Jonathan Waxman is chair of HGS REACH, the RA’s new climate action committee. See committee report on page 9.

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