



Chester World Development Forum:
Meeting with our MP – Chris Matheson on 25 January 2022
in The Unity Centre

Present: John Tacon, Georgina Wilson, Terry Green, Vicki Jenner, Ann McCarthy, Lindsay Cussons, Gill Miller, Terry Walsh, Tom Ormiston, Jean Cornes, Brian and Katy Rowe, Peter Speirs, Mike and Rose Johnson, Ken Walker, Kathryn Gornall, Catherine Green, Ethan Winkworth and Andrew Needham.

Joining via Zoom – Bernard Payne, Luke Blakely, Arnold Wilkes, Mark Bendall, Ron Reid, and Mike (no surname given).

Question 1: What are your thoughts on restoring the aid budget to 0.7%?
What is the Labour Party's policy on this issue and how is the party going to persuade Parliament and the British public that this is the right thing to do?

Labour believes very strongly in the principle of aid and would restore the aid budget to 0.7% of GDP.

Reducing the aid budget was opposed by the Labour party and some prominent Conservatives eg Andrew Mitchell (former Minister for International Development?). Seems to promote a more "insular" view and coupled with the merger of International Development into the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office suggests a different priority for aid. In particular, aid is being used as a diplomatic tool. Labour party has retained a Shadow Minister for International Development.

Question 2: Following on from that, we understand the UK Government has rebranded its development bank (currently known as CDC Group) and dropped the word "development" from its name and with it any pretence that it will use the bank to tackle global inequalities.

Seems to indicate a refocusing in that the bank supporting "businesses" rather than aid.

Commercial interests have become the priority over countries which need genuine aid. Clearly there also needs to be more transparency in their dealings. Chris encouraged us to persist with campaigning and lobbying. Lobbying should be addressed to the FCDO including civil servants ... and Chris Matheson himself!

Question 3: What is Alok Sharma doing behind the scenes to ensure that nations are taking action to reduce carbon emissions before the COP27 meeting in Cairo in 2022?

Alok Sharma seems very committed to the issue.

COP26 was a missed opportunity and too many countries are dragging their feet.

The problem is that there are a lot of other complex issues going on in the world - Uyghurs (China), Ukraine (Russia). Countries are having to concentrate on sorting out disputes instead of dealing with the climate crisis.

Chris fears that environmental issues are being "traded away" in the politics.

Alok Sharma faces questions in the Commons for half an hour once a month.

Question 4: How does the Labour Party plan to engage younger people in “development issues”?

A Parliament Week was held in November 2021, and Chris visited a number of primary schools in the area.

In October 2021, he attended the youth conference held in Chester Cathedral and organised by the university; 60-70 students attended.

Talking to young people at the meetings led him to believe that it isn't young people we need to get on board but older people!

Question 5: Re the resettlement programme of refugees particularly those from Afghanistan – what do you think about the work of the Home Office with regard to the resettlement programme? What is the Select Committee doing about the present housing situation for refugees and asylum seekers?

This is really difficult as we cannot get people out of Afghanistan at the moment. The UK is trying to suggest that those wanting to leave should get to a third country (Pakistan) and then maybe they can be helped.

20,000 Afghan nationals need to be resettled in the long term but the government doesn't appear to be in any hurry. The system at present is very unhelpful.

Why is resettlement in UK so slow? Housing seems to be the main problem. People have offered their homes but there are legality and safeguarding issues.

Chester City of Sanctuary and CWaC council are working together locally on the resettlement programme.

Question 6: How can we as a Forum campaign on development issues?

Keep on challenging and making a noise.

Legislation needs to be at the forefront.

Be proud of our principle of helping people who are more in need than us.

Write to the FCDO asking for change to the way aid money is spent

Andrew Needham made an observation regarding the target of ‘net zero by 2045’ which has been set in Cheshire East – why should businesses there be pushed to be net zero by 2045 when other local authorities have set that target for 2050?

Chris responded that there needed to be consultation with all sectors of business.