

LOCKDOWN 2020

CONSEQUENCES

**WHAT LESSONS HAVE
WE LEARNED
FROM THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

There is a Magic Money Tree after all

*When there is sufficient political will,
the money can be found to fund necessary projects*

Listen to expert advice *and act on it*

For example in Oct 2016 the Department of Health tasked Public Health England to assess the UK's preparedness and response to a pandemic 'flu outbreak. Public Health England duly carried out Exercise Cygnus, focussed on the Treatment & Escalation phases of a pandemic response (the other phases being Detection, Assessment and Recovery).

They identified a number of key areas in need of attention, including the key learning that :
"... the UK's preparedness and response, in terms of its plans, policies and capability, is currently not sufficient to cope with the extreme demands of a severe pandemic that will have a nation wide impact across all sectors"

The government chose not to publish the report. The Telegraph newspaper commented that the findings were deemed "too terrifying" to be made public. It was leaked to the Guardian newspaper who published it.

When there's no scientific consensus apply the Precautionary Principle

The precautionary principle has four central components:

1. taking preventive action in the face of uncertainty
2. shifting the burden of proof to the proponents of an activity
3. exploring a wide range of alternatives to possibly harmful actions
4. increasing public participation in decision making
e.g. Citizens Assemblies

Act quickly & decisively

Delay risks making things worse and more costly - both in terms of money and more importantly lives

Inform & involve the people

Don't hide difficult facts from the population. Treat them like adults and tell the truth. When people understand the need for dramatic lifestyle changes they will in general accept them.

If you make a mistake, be honest about it

Perhaps the hardest thing for a politician to do, because of the fear that it will lose votes and cost them their position of power and influence. But most of us see through bluster and waffle, and the danger is that it reduces our respect for politicians in general.

The truth worth of essential but undervalued workers

There have been many unsung heroes on the front line, risking their lives on a daily basis and often for relatively poor pay. Health service personnel, bus drivers, delivery drivers, shop staff and refuse collectors for example. They have clearly demonstrated that without them our society would not be able to function.

Faced with a common challenge people will come together to deal with it

There have been many examples of communities coming together for mutual aid and support:

e.g. delivering medication and supplies to vulnerable residents ... volunteering to work at foodbanks ... singing from city apartment balconies to lift neighbours' mood

Localisation is essential for resilience *and Globalisation exposes us to great risks*

Globalisation tends to put profit before people and planet. Excessive competition drives prices too low, so corners are cut and wages are cut. Global travel by air and sea enables diseases and pests to spread quickly.

We need to value and support local businesses. This reduces the length of supply chains and reduces the risk of disruption.

Many people can work more from home

There has been a revolution in on-line meetings and many people are now saying they will work more from home. This will save wasted time commuting, and reduce road traffic with its associated the pollution.

This will not be appropriate for everyone, but it will be suitable for many people. There will of course be times when face to face or site meetings are more appropriate and effective.

Pollution levels drop dramatically when polluting industries shut down

Which is entirely to be expected, but the marked reduction in air pollution in cities for example has highlighted the benefits of a decarbonised world and opened a debate about the harm to human health that is inevitably caused by air pollution. Problems like heart and lung disease caused by air pollution have been found to increase peoples' susceptibility to attack from viruses like COVID19.

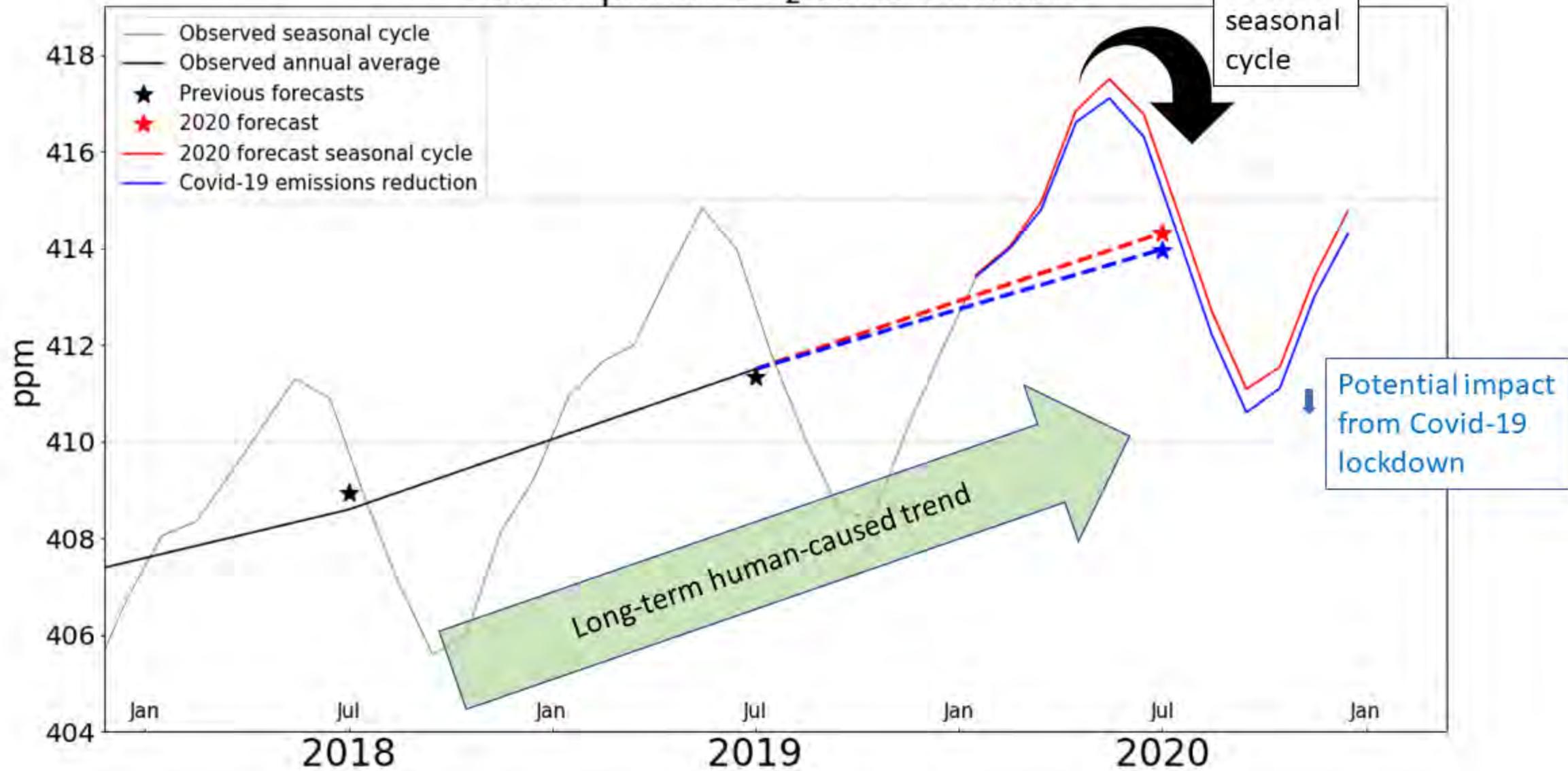
There are other reasons why we urgently need to choose a better way of living, both for ourselves and the planet.

In particular there are two threats bearing down on us that dwarf the COVID19 pandemic. They are the warming of the planet caused by excessive greenhouse gas emissions, and the disintegration of the natural world on which we depend for our survival.

These two crises will not be solved by a couple of months of lockdown and social distancing, or a vaccine.

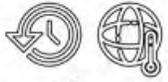
Initially it seemed like very good news when reports began coming in of greatly reduced greenhouse gas emissions. But then scientists looked at the maths and a depressing picture emerged of manmade greenhouse gas emissions continuing to rise relentlessly, and the estimated 8% reduction resulting from the COVID19 pandemic proving to be negligible. This is made clear in the following graph ...

Atmospheric CO₂ concentration



In spite of all the evidence and warnings that scientists have presented for many decades, we have failed to take the action required to deal with the developing global warming crisis.

The following graph shows the exponential rise in atmospheric CO₂ that has developed since the Industrial Revolution ...



GLOBAL CO₂ LEVELS

Click and drag in the plot area to zoom in



Source <https://www.2degreesinstitute.org/>

COP21 – Paris 2015

196 countries signed the ‘Paris Agreement’

agreeing to keep the increase in global average temperature to :

“... well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels”

and

“... to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C”

Since the Paris Agreement was signed there has been some progress in addressing the issue of GHG emissions, most notably in the development of renewable energy sources where the cost of production has fallen dramatically to the point where it is now the cheapest way to produce energy.

<https://get-green-now.com/cost-of-renewable-energy-vs-non-renewable-fossil-fuels/>

But ... global emissions have continued to rise as seen in a previous graph, and atmospheric CO2 levels are at a record high never before experienced by humans.

The UK government claims that we have significantly reduced our GHG emissions between 1990 and 2018 by 43% to 451 MtCO₂e, mainly due to the reduction in the use of coal ... BUT this does not include for the emissions from UK based aviation and shipping which amounted to 41 MtCO₂e in 2018, and neither does it include the emissions produced in the manufacture of all the food and goods we import.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/final-uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions-national-statistics>

UK based aviation emissions have more than doubled since 1990.

Domestic transport is the largest emitter of GHG in the UK, responsible for 28% in 2018.

UK emissions for transport have declined by only 3% since 1990.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/final-uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions-national-statistics>

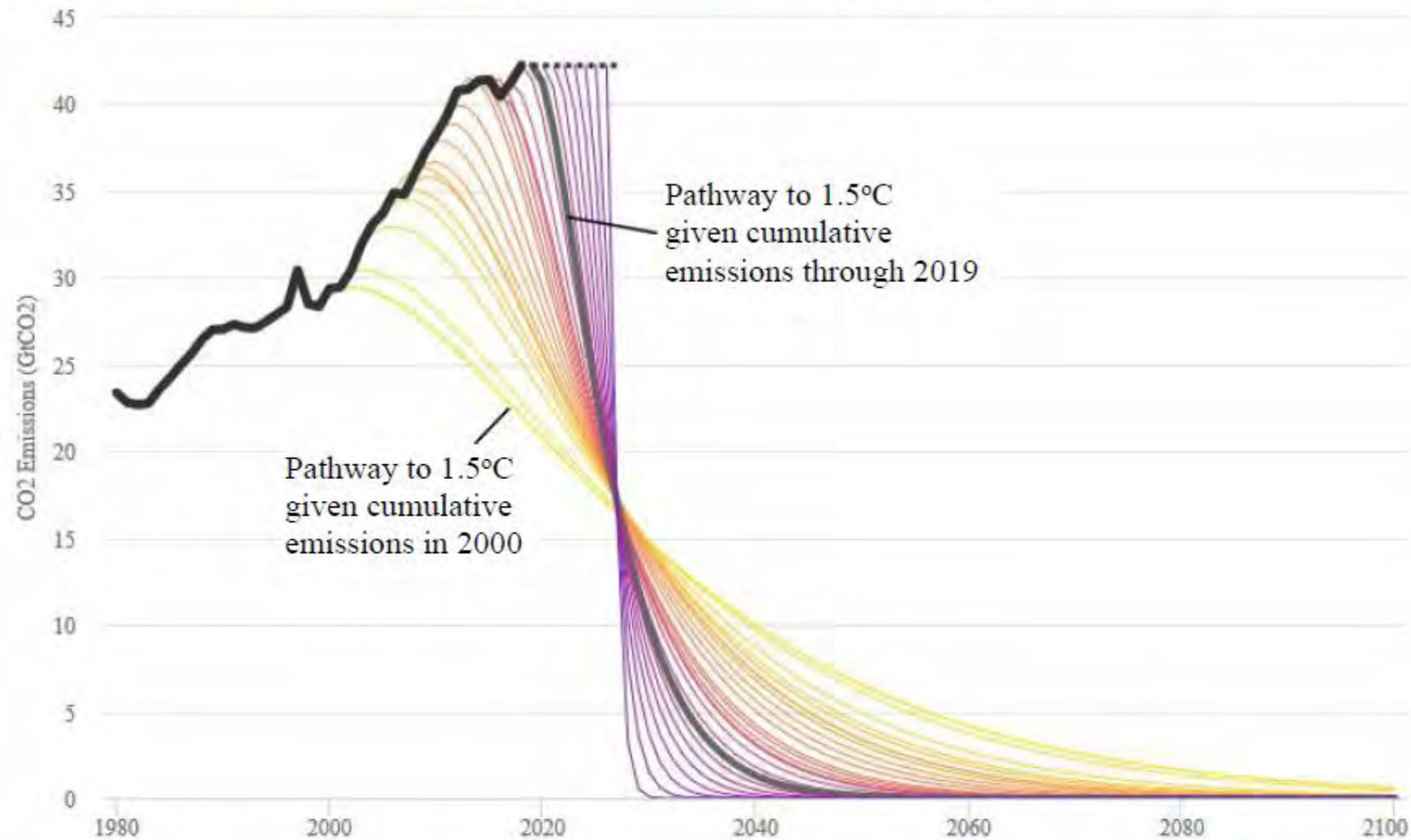
Whilst car engines have become much more efficient, there has been a massive increase in the sales of bigger heavier vehicles. SUV sales have recently accounted for a third of global private vehicle sales, so GHG emissions have not reduced as much as they could have done.

Every month we delay taking adequate measures to address global warming makes the task of keeping the temperature rise below 1.5° more challenging.

This is shown in the following graph, which illustrates the increasingly difficult reduction rate of CO₂ emissions that is required ...

Emissions are still increasing at this time and the 1.5° target is slipping out of reach

Limiting warming to 1.5C is increasingly difficult without large-scale negative emissions



<https://www.carbonbrief.org/unep-1-5c-climate-target-slipping-out-of-reach>

So - what choices might we WEEMG members make as we come out of lockdown. Go back to the old Business As Usual model ... or something better ?