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MY SUSTAINABILITY JOURNEY

BMSP7002 assignment 3



Let me start by introducing myself. I was born in the 1970s in a small city in Lincolnshire, the second child of four.

Growing up in the 80s wasn't always easy, but it did feel like a much simpler time. My family wasn't wealthy – my dad was a spray painter and my mum worked in a local supermarket - so we lived a fairly frugal lifestyle.

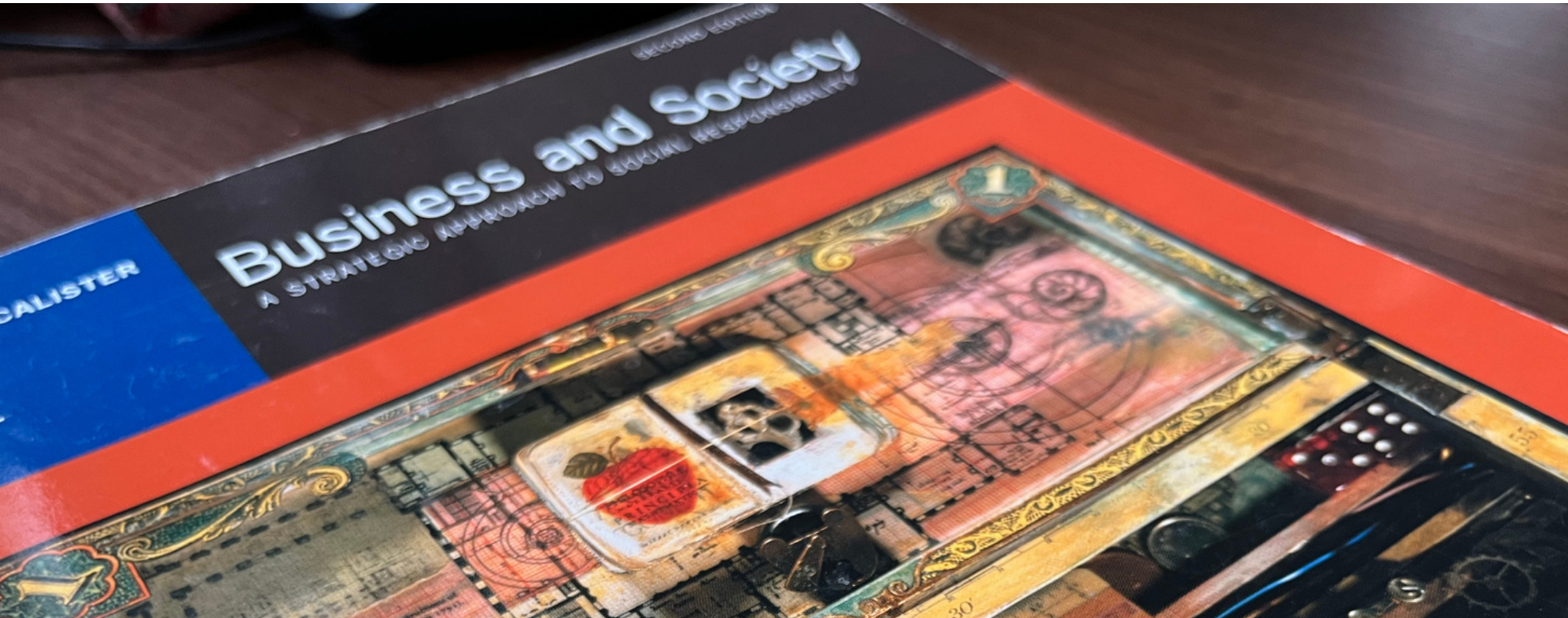




As a child most of my clothes were hand-me-downs, our food was bought locally, and we cycled nearly everywhere we went as owning and running a car was an expensive luxury.

I was the first in my family to go to university and in 2002 I began studying for a degree in PR and Criminology. It was during this time that I was first introduced to the role of business within society.

Although it had been around for many years, interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) from both the world of business and academia seemed to be growing and my earlier beliefs were grounded in the arguments of Kotler and Lee (2005) who argued that a business can help tackle some of the problems facing local communities by doing discretionary acts, such as charitable donations, that help improve people's lives.



However, as much as I believed that business has a role to play in making our society better, I realised that there are limitations with the role of CSR in business. There were many (such as May, Cheney and Roper, 2007) who argued that CSR could be seen as the latest marketing fad – a ‘thing to do’ – and raised questions over whether companies were using CSR as a form of greenwashing.



They also questioned whether CSR would be a permanent element of how businesses operate, however, they did acknowledge that a growing number of businesses were indeed incorporating CSR into their operational activity. And despite any uncertainty around the future of CSR, it does seem to have stood the test of time and over the years there have been many initiatives, such as the Tesco Race for Life partnership with Cancer Research.



But in 2010 I watched with horror as the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig released over 130 million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The impacts on local wildlife and the local community were catastrophic and are still being felt today (Meiners, 2020). I wondered how much more damage was being done to our environment and living species that we weren't aware of.

In 2017, I listened to David Attenborough on the BBC's Blue Planet talk about the dangers of the climate crisis on our planet and the damage that is being caused by plastic pollution and I started to once again question the role of business in our society.



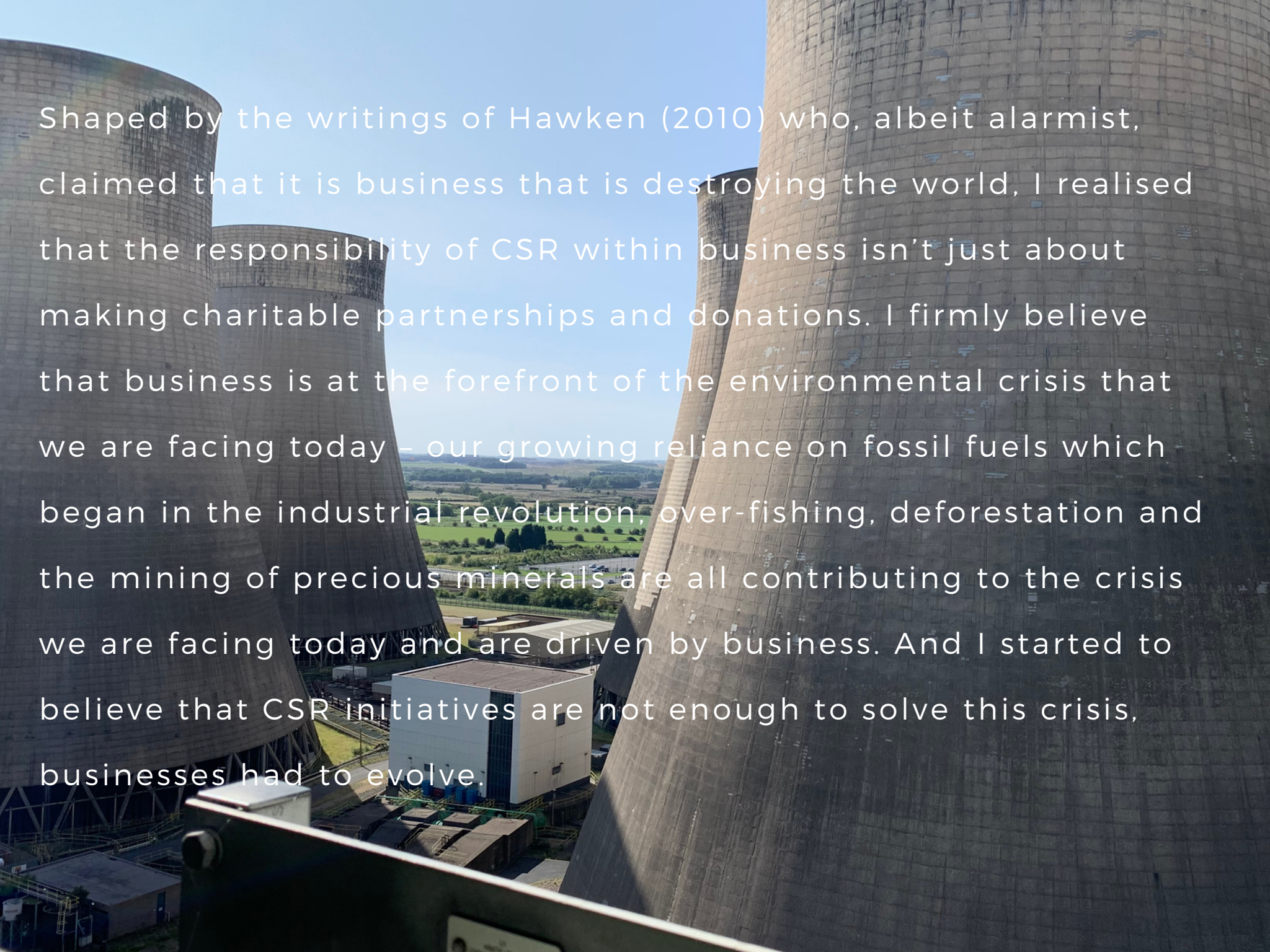


From an early age my parents instilled in me a strong sense of right and wrong and of social justice, and I'd found myself following a career path that led to activism, campaigning and politics. However, when I became a mum, I really started to think about what kind of world I wanted to leave behind for my children and future grandchildren to live in.

It was at this point that I made the decision to return to the days of my childhood. I made changes to my own life by shopping locally. I reduced the amount of plastics that I used and moved out of the city and into a rural hamlet where we began growing our own food and creating a haven for wildlife. I returned to the days of cycling whenever I could and I stopped buying new, favouring picking up pre-loved items in charity shops and online. But the small changes that I was making, although important, weren't enough to make an impact.





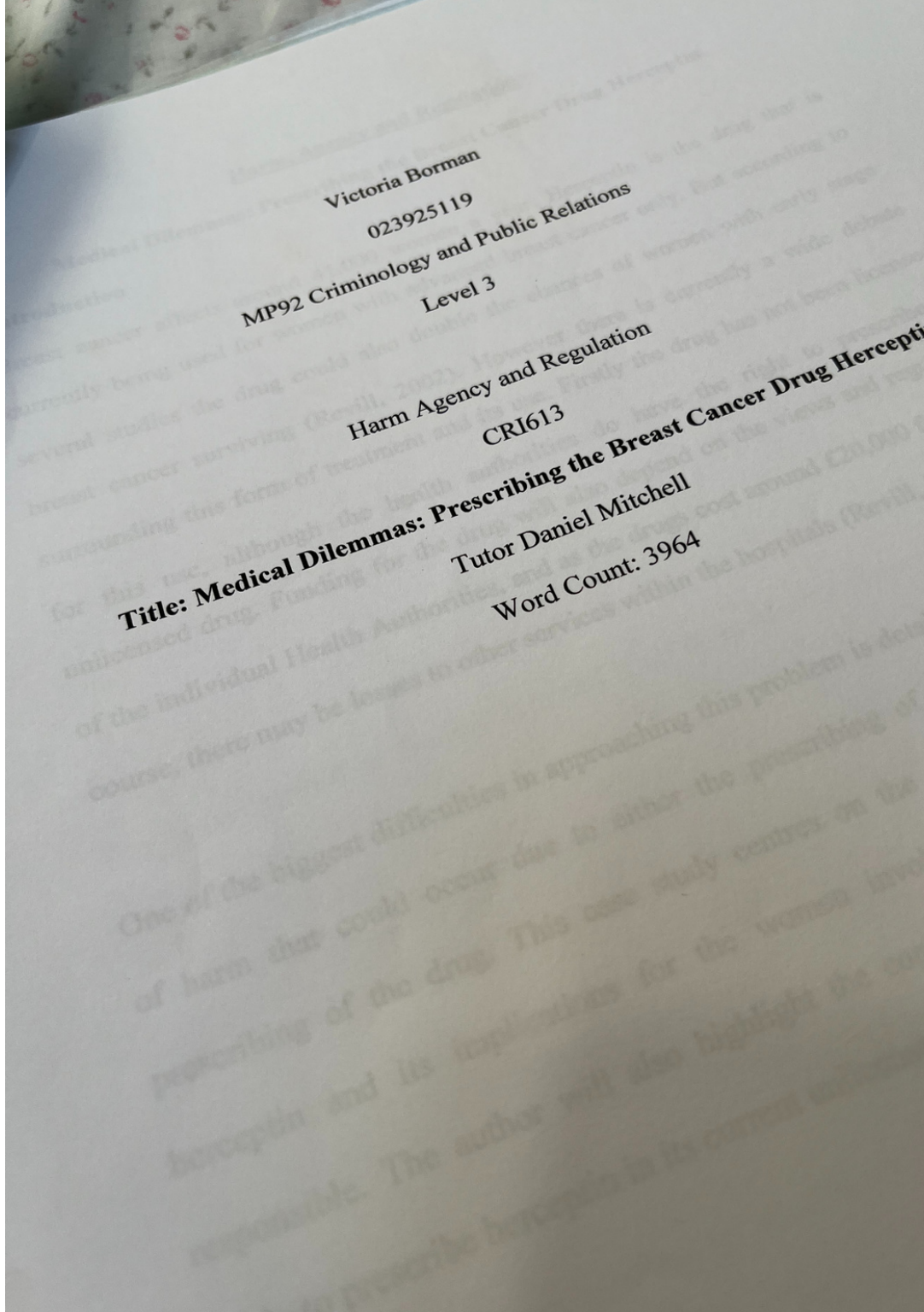


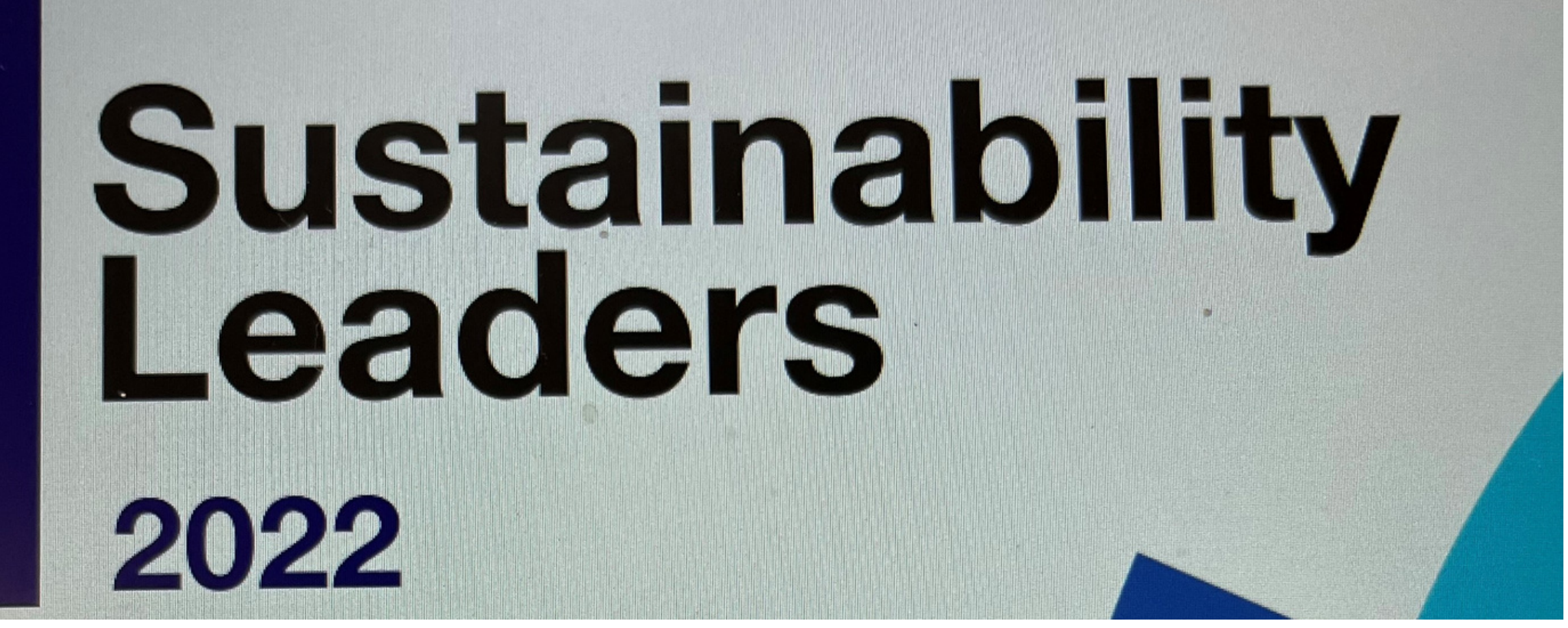
Shaped by the writings of Hawken (2010) who, albeit alarmist, claimed that it is business that is destroying the world, I realised that the responsibility of CSR within business isn't just about making charitable partnerships and donations. I firmly believe that business is at the forefront of the environmental crisis that we are facing today – our growing reliance on fossil fuels which began in the industrial revolution, over-fishing, deforestation and the mining of precious minerals are all contributing to the crisis we are facing today and are driven by business. And I started to believe that CSR initiatives are not enough to solve this crisis, businesses had to evolve.

I had never agreed with the argument put forward by Milton Friedman (1970) that there is only one social responsibility of business and that is to increase its profits. I believe a more compelling argument was put across by the American economist Bowen (1953, quoted in May, Cheney and Roper, 2007) who argued that achieving a profit does not have to be incompatible with the idea of social responsibility and acting in an ethical way. A business must be profitable in order to grow, provide employment, and produce better products, but I have never believed that it should be the sole purpose of business.



I believe that businesses and governments have an ethical and moral responsibility to tackle not just the environmental problems we are facing, but societal problems such as poverty, education for children, and access to shelter, food and water. During my degree I studied the role of the harm, agency and regulation, with a focus on the availability of medicines in relation to the ethical responsibility for preserving human life.





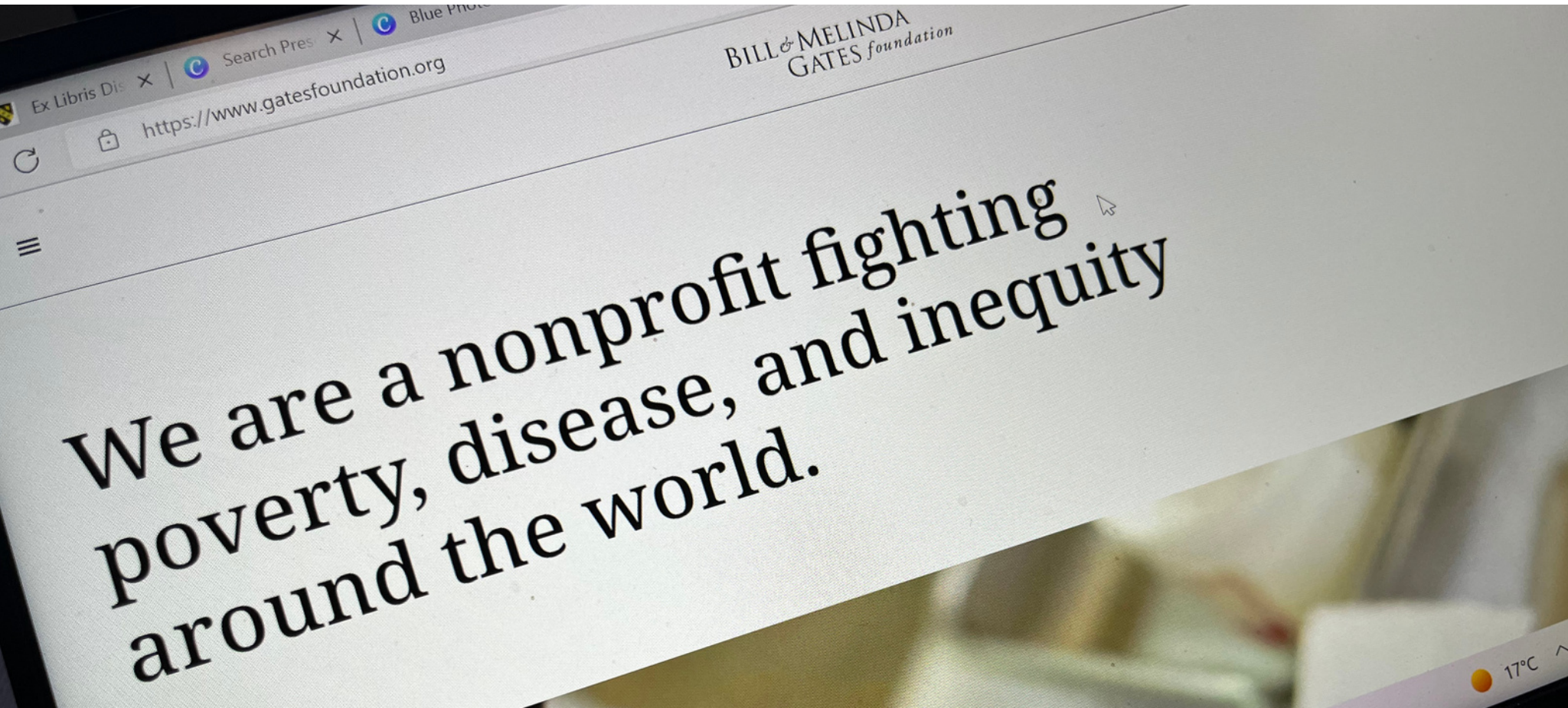
Although earlier discussions from DeGeorge (1987, quoted in Wasieleski and Weber, 2019) around ethics in business focussed on workers' rights and the morality of capitalism, later discussions that shaped my thinking included the role of business in making ethical decisions around both environmental and societal issues.

And I've seen a shift in recent years. This year's GlobeScan Sustainability Leaders report highlighted that 96% of experts believe tackling climate change is urgent, with biodiversity loss, water and food scarcity and plastic waste following.



And I realised that there are businesses that exist that are shaped around a set of values and purpose, where their business model is not defined by the sole aim of making a profit. Businesses like Timpson's who, under the leadership of James Timpson, work with prison leavers to provide them with the opportunity to build a new life, or the Luminary Bakery, a social enterprise in London who provide training, employment and community to some of the most disadvantaged women in London.

I began to realise that organisations and business leaders were using their capital, knowledge and leadership to deliver in areas that were traditionally covered by governments – such as the Bill and Miranda Gates Foundation who use their platform to fight poverty, disease and inequality – and this fundamentally changed the way I viewed businesses role in our society and made me realise that not only was the role between business and governments changing, but we were growing ever more reliant on businesses to deliver more than products, jobs and pay taxes.



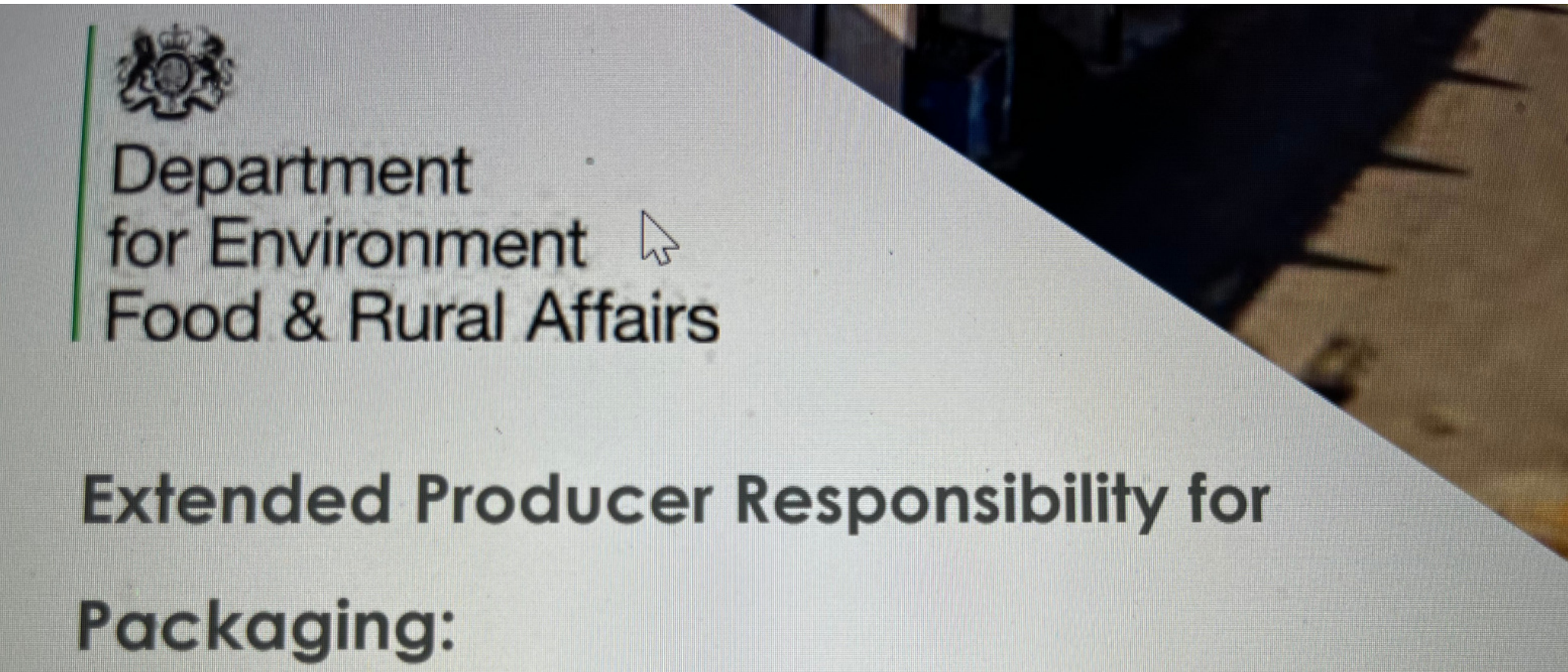
After twelve years of working in politics I decided that the time had come to move into a role that was more closely linked to both my passion for business and for sustainability. In 2019 I moved into a role in the energy sector. I wanted to be part of this change and the drive for a more sustainable future.

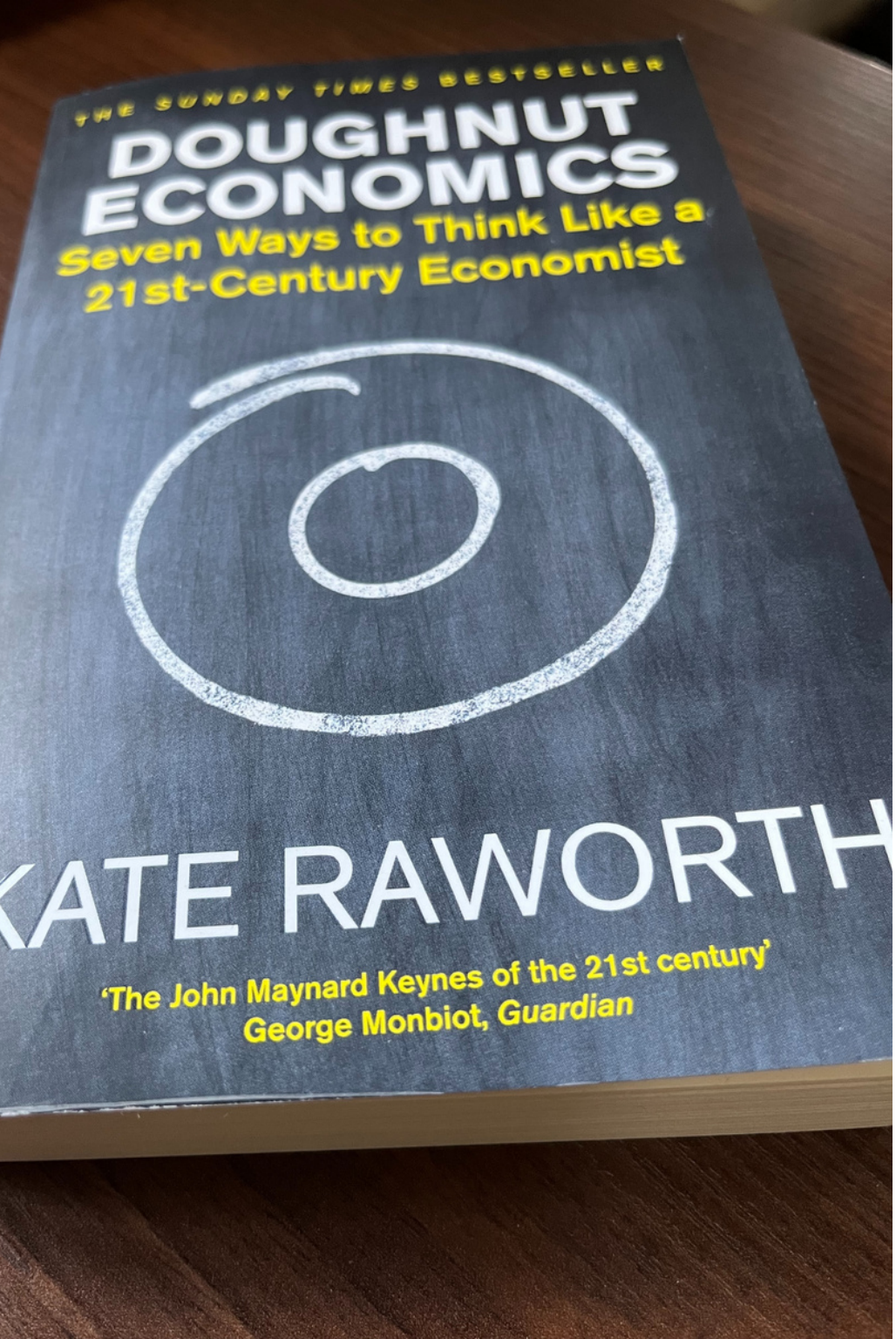




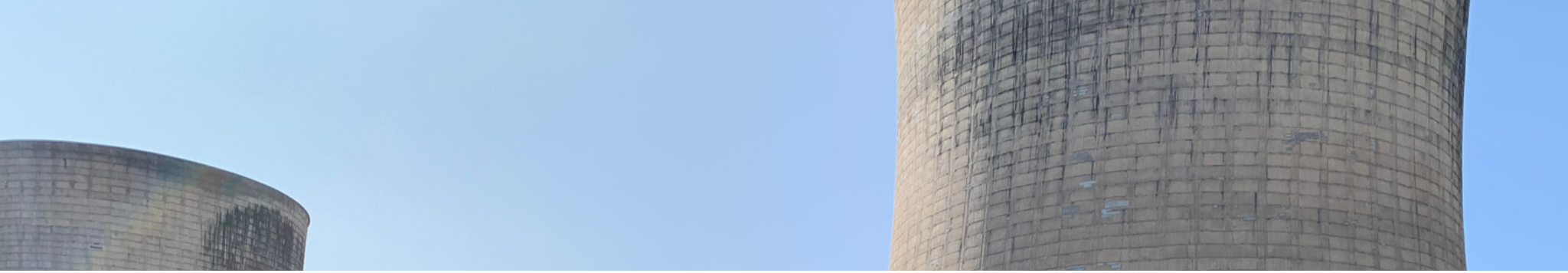
But governments still have an important role to play, and an increasing number of experts believe governments should lead the sustainability agenda. Working with politicians and now in a public affairs role, my focus was also based around the role of governments in setting policy and regulations and the impact and effectiveness of this within the role of business.

I also realised that there is a balance to be struck in tackling climate change and the role of business and governments. Political pressure means that many governments are introducing their own net zero targets, the UK for example has introduced into law a target of being net zero by 2050 and other countries have their own. And I've witnessed the Scottish government's move to develop a circular economy and the UK government's plans to tackle packaging waste with an extended producer responsibility.





However, I still think there is a long way to go for both business and governments. I read the work of Raworth (2017) who argued for a new economic system, one that moved away from the old fixation on GDP and moved towards an economy that met humanity's needs but also didn't exceed the capacity of the planet



In the late 19th century, the growth of the use of fossil fuels marked the beginning of the industrial revolution – a fundamental change in our way of life was driven by business. I started to think that if business was at the forefront of the first industrial revolution, then business should be at the forefront of a new drive for a green future.



In 2021, keen to learn more about the role of sustainability in business and how leaders can lead, I enrolled in the MBA (Sustainability Leadership). So far I have learnt more about the role of business within our society and how leaders can tackle some of the growing problems the planet is facing.
I do not know where my career will take me next, but I am excited for the next chapter and keen to play my role in building a more sustainable society.





THE END
THANK YOU