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# Climate emergency: adapting to change

**AS ENGINEERS**, we are good at adapting to new situations. We rely on our understanding of underlying principles and can apply these to new contexts as the needs arise. The impact of Covid-19 and 'lockdown' across the world has been dominating the press and people's thoughts for several months – it has had an immediate and, for many, deeply personal impact on our daily lives.

We have all had to adapt to change in our professional and family activities. Now, as we hope to return to some kind of normal, we need to find ways to adapt, as engineers, in response to the climate emergency, which continues to be the biggest threat to our long-term survival.

In June 2019, structural engineering practices declared a climate emergency and made commitments to change their practice ([www.structurallengineersdeclare.com](http://www.structurallengineersdeclare.com)). The Institution, acting in response to this, has been adapting, through its committees and panels, rethinking its priorities in education, membership, ethics, awards and all areas of professional life.

In the January 2020 issue of *The Structural Engineer*, we highlighted some of these changes and also spoke of ways firms could adapt ([www.istructe.org/turning-climate-commitment-into-action/](http://www.istructe.org/turning-climate-commitment-into-action/)). To support this, the Institution established a Climate Emergency Task Group (CETG) to lead its actions (see [page 9](#) for details).

From this month, *The Structural Engineer* will regularly feature a 'Climate emergency' section that includes viewpoints, examples of good practice and technical guidance around the key climate emergency themes.

This month we start with an article that introduces the six themes underlying change in the profession ([page 8](#)) – these themes will be central to the Institution's future communications. There is an article from Will Arnold that shows just how much impact every structural engineer can have in the course of a year to reduce their carbon footprint

([page 10](#)). And there is a provocation from past President, Tim Ibell, and colleagues arguing the case for a minimum-intervention future ([page 12](#)).

I would also highlight the profile of Kate Simonen, from the USA, who is showing great leadership towards a low-carbon future ([page 41](#)). This acts as a great reminder that the challenges we face are global and we need to work together and learn from each other if we are to make progress fast enough.

Looking forward, next month will see the launch of the structural engineering 'Plan of Works', which aligns with the RIBA 2020 plan and includes elements of sustainability planning from the outset of a project through to construction on site. In addition, we will launch a comprehensive new guide on calculating carbon, providing structural engineers with principles to follow so that we are able to compare embodied carbon across our projects. Please look out for these.

Finally, I'd like to remind you that this is your institution and I hope that what you see and experience, both online and in print, will stimulate you to share your own experiences and ideas that would help others decrease their carbon impact. The Institution is keen to hear from you. Please send your suggestions to [climateemergency@istructe.org](mailto:climateemergency@istructe.org).

