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Good morning. Very glad – Thank you Julie, Aileen and Ciaran etc.

And I'm delighted that the selection of Glasgow as a Frontrunner City in the Connecting Nature programme has allowed us a further opportunity to collaborate with our international peers in seeking a safer and fairer future for our planet.

Glasgow's status as host for COP26 has – even this far - been incredible opportunity to join truly global conversations on the solutions to the challenges of the climate emergency. There's a tangible willingness across the world to share knowledge, skills and experience and together take the practical steps necessary to achieve our Net Zero targets. The Connecting Nature programme and the Innovation Summits are additionally important strand to this collaborative approach and I am proud that the really significant strides we are taking as a city are being recognised. In so many ways Glasgow is a template for those cities which have been on a similar historic path – one of industrial decline, the physical and social challenges created by the past and how we can remerge into the low carbon and sustainable focus of the present.

Over the course of the next few days you will hear about much of the work being undertaken here in Glasgow - our policies, strategies, approaches and partnerships to deliver a wide and diverse range of nature-based interventions. And indeed across all of Scotland. I would particularly like to thank my colleague Gillian Dick for the work she leads on in Glasgow on nature-based solutions, her input into the Connecting Nature project and the work of the Glasgow Connecting Nature Team in helping deliver this important summit.

I want to make two points. I mentioned a moment ago the global engagement which Glasgow's COP host status has enabled. Central to that has been the importance of cities – as the places where most of the world's citizens live, work and travel within – to the Net Zero agenda. We are literally the emissions heatmaps. Cities like Glasgow, Genk and Poznan, are where both the greatest challenges and the greatest gains for carbon neutrality lie. And alongside and within climate action lie the greatest opportunities for social and economic renewal Covid recovery demands.

In so many ways therefore, the climate emergency is an urban agenda. It's cities which deliver. But nature-based solutions are absolutely critical within that. And investment in nature-based solutions in that urban context will deliver considerably more bang for your investment buck – in terms of the ecological, environmental and social gains. And to the well-being of so many citizens.

The mainstreaming of the sustainability agenda in the urban context also provides us with so many opportunities for natural interventions. To give just one example, Glasgow's Avenues programme is a long-term projects to redesign and reprioritise our key city centre thoroughfares, to reduce the dominance of the car and create cleaner, healthier spaces. Within this there the planting of street trees is central, transforming streets into spaces for recreation which well-being and help deliver a host of other social and environmental benefits.

I am also determined that the Net Zero agenda is delivered and communicated in a way that resonates with ordinary citizens and is relevant to their everyday lives and challenges. So, when I talk about inseparability of climate and social justice what I mean is this is about warmer, more fuel efficient homes and the positive impact it has on the cost of living, or its about building up skills and job opportunities for the new green economy. When I talk about nature-based solutions what I'm saying is we're making Glasgow a healthier, more attractive and generally better place to live.

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Glasgow's industrial past has left swathes of vacant and derelict land, toxic scars which have blighted far too many of our most socially challenged communities for generations. There's an urgency now about repurposing these as spaces for recreation, for growing, for carbon sequestration, rain and flood capture and for health and community engagement opportunities.

The reminder that within this agenda we need to give equal weighting to the grey and blue zones, as well as the green, is also particularly pertinent in Glasgow. Our river, the Clyde, was the catalyst for and location of much of our industrialisation. Yet, save for some regeneration in the past two decades, our riverside, just yards from which on either bank lie some of Scotland's most socially challenged communities, has too often festered, lain abandoned. As some of these communities were developed in the 1970s and 1980s, we literally turned our backs on the river. But the interventions the Clyde needs to mitigate against the threats of global warming have the capacity to release land and transform our riverside, our blue zone – the biggest open space in our city. And not solely for economic purposes – for leisure, recreation, to improve and nurture the biodiversity nurtured by the Clyde. This is a nature-based solution on a grand scale and one with the potential to deliver what our citizens always ask of us – the return of the Clyde as the centrepiece of city life.

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