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International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

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Reason for optimism - the end of coal in the UK



With global and national news as unrelenting as it is, and with weather to match, it is increasingly difficult to be optimistic. The closure of Ratcliffe Power Station this week, one of the UK's last remaining coal-fired plants, is clearly a reason for optimism, marking a significant milestone in the UK's greener energy landscape. Yet

even this was tinged with nostalgic sadness and regret, particularly due to the proposed demolition of the plant's majestic and iconic cooling towers.

The Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station in Nottinghamshire is one of the last vestiges of the UK's coal industry. Opened in 1968, it has been a cornerstone of the country's energy supply for decades, powering homes and industries across the Midlands. However, as the UK strives to meet its net-zero carbon emissions target by 2050, the continued use of coal is no longer viable. The end of coal and the shift to cleaner alternatives, such as wind, solar, and nuclear energy, signal an era of reduced carbon emissions, cleaner air, and less reliance on fossil fuels – an optimistic trajectory for the environment and future generations.

For many, the end of coal is a victory, heralding the transition to a greener energy future. Yet, there is also a sense of loss, particularly among those who grew up in coal-reliant communities. According to a recent report on the State of the Coalfields, many former coalfields are in the most deprived parts of the country, with average life expectancy around a year less than the national average, and 7.1% of people reporting that their health is "bad" or "very bad" compared to the 5.2% national average.

The cooling towers of Ratcliffe-on-Soar have become more than just industrial structures; they are local landmarks and symbols of a bygone era. The writer James Graham, reflecting on his childhood in the shadow of these towers, eloquently expressed this sentiment. He described the towers as "familiar giants" and "concrete cathedrals" that shaped the landscape and identity of the local area. Their demolition, if it were to happen, would not simply represent the end of a chapter in the UK's industrial story but, for many, would be a loss of heritage and legacy.

James Graham argues that, like Battersea Power Station in London, the Nottinghamshire cooling towers should be preserved and repurposed – they would make a majestic memorial. But even more momentous would be improving the lives of the people living in those communities.

This means addressing the interconnected challenges of our ageing population and climate change, so that more people are supported to live longer than ever in a sustainable manner. The same is true across the globe.

As readers will know the ILC-UK is a member of the ILC Global Alliance which has set up a Climate Change Committee to advocate for policy change and a greater understanding of the interplay between the joint issues of longevity and the climate crisis. On Thursday 24 October, the ILC Global Alliance will be holding a webinar on the nexus of climate change and longevity.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Professor Karl Pillemer, Gerontologist, Cornell University
- Dr. Mayeso Chinseu Lazaro, Educator and Researcher, University of Malawi
- Nicola Torley, Longevity Consultant, Hymans Robertson
- Dr Anandita Pattnaik, Policy Officer, UK Health Alliance on Climate Change

For more details see here and use the button below to register directly on zoom.

REGISTER HERE

ILC perceptions review - a temperature check



As David Sinclair, ILC's Chief Executive explains in his blog published today, we've been asking our funders, partners, and friends what comes to mind when they think of ILC's work. We gathered insights from Parliamentarians, civil servants, journalists, and charity workers to understand how perceptions of ILC have changed over the past five or six years, helping us refine our strategy and better communicate our impact.

We surveyed people on our mailing list and with the help of an independent external consultant conducted one-to-one interviews. Given the time you spent responding, we feel it's only right to share the results with you.

The good news is that your descriptions of ILC align with how we see ourselves. The most frequently mentioned words were "research, insightful, relevant, important, and international." When asked who we are, the majority described us as experts on the impact of longevity on society.

There was some recognition of our distinctiveness, with one person calling us "a serious think tank that is never dull, always insightful," while another praised us for bringing fresh perspectives to jaded policy discussions. Our convening power and reach into politics and policy were noted, and five of the long interview participants specifically said that we "punch above our weight."

However, not all the feedback was positive. One respondent felt we were "scattergun, arrogant, blinkered... shouty," while others believed we try to do too much: "Like many charities, the ILC has had to fight hard for funding and perhaps spread itself too thinly." Despite these challenges, many respondents praised our high-quality staff and impact.

A recurring theme was the need to clarify our identity. While many people understood that we focus on demography, there was still confusion about whether we are an older person's charity. This highlights the need to better communicate who we are and what we do. Looking ahead, you had several suggestions for us, including focusing on younger age groups and increasing our media presence to better communicate our impact.

Since our last review in 2018, it's clear we've made progress. Six years ago, many struggled to describe who we were, but today, we are recognised for our expertise and impact. While the pace of change sometimes feels slow, two-thirds of our respondents expressed interest in working with us more. If you would like to work with us please get in touch here.

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Party conferences - ILC in Brighton, Liverpool & Birmingham

Brighton, Liverpool and Birmingham – a round up of three political party conferences



Over the last three weeks members of ILC team have been in Brighton, Liverpool and Birmingham for the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative party conferences. We attended many events – including organising our own – had valuable one-on-one conversations, and networked our socks off.

Liberal Democrats in Brighton

The sun shone brightly in Brighton, and the Liberal Democrat Conference had a definite optimistic and upbeat feel this year – with a record-breaking 72 MPs, it's not surprising.

Despite the buzz, the relatively few externally sponsored fringe meetings meant politicians could properly engage without having to speak at three events all taking place at the same time.

The Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey's closing address to the conference, was similar to his campaigning during the general election: energetic and optimistic, interlaced with very serious personal issues. Drawing upon his experiences as a carer, he reiterated his party's focus on pressuring the Government to improve health and social care.

Labour in Liverpool

Labour's first conference in Government for 15 years was the biggest and busiest ever but was strangely subdued due to the controversies over the Winter Fuel Allowance proposals, ministerial freebies, and the escalating conflict in the Middle East. The miserable weather didn't help. However, spirits lifted on Tuesday with the Prime Minister's well-received speech. The mention of the ageing population alongside other challenges the country faces was welcome, as was the line about the trade-offs facing the nation, which could have been lifted directly from ILC's route map for long lives.

We could not disagree with Wes Streeting's focus on shifting healthcare from "analogue to digital, from hospital to community, from sickness to prevention," nor

Public Health Minister Andrew Gwynne's emphasis on preventing ill-health. However, we would have liked to hear more from the front bench on lifelong learning and skills development for all ages.

ILC's futures-focused breakfast roundtable, supported by Brightwell, exploring the implications of longer lives for future generations, was informative and engaging. Liverpool, despite its grey skies, remained as charming as ever.

Conservatives in Birmingham

Unsurprisingly, given the General Election result and the current leadership contest, there was a greatly reduced presence from businesses, lobbyists, and the media. However, the tone was oddly buoyant. There was no great lashing out at other parties over the General Election result, nor any self-flagellation over their own election efforts. The fringe meetings were largely forward-facing and solutions-focused, with events on green issues, skills, and growth being well attended.

The four candidates involved in the leadership election campaign were kept busy with full schedules, and it was tricky to walk around the conference centre without being mown down by one entourage or another. While the conference was attended by many former MPs, the frustration for the candidates must be the low attendance of the 121 MPs currently eligible to vote in next week's ballot. Only when the four have been whittled down to the final two will the wider Conservative Party membership have their say. The outcome is hard to call, but Tom Tugendhat clearly won the best merch competition with the "I'm a Tugend-hat" baseball cap, temporary tattos - Tugend-tats – and the Tugend-tan spray tan.

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