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Home of Adam Smith to host radical thinking sessions on how to mitigate climate crisis

A celebrated environmental and polar scientist and the first woman to head up a major UK bank are today unveiled as keynote speakers for an ambitious public-facing project by Heriot-Watt University modelled on the Enlightenment era.

The project's mission is to identify ten key priorities to mitigate climate crisis; areas where the university, partnered with industry and government, can help provide solutions.

Panmure House in Edinburgh is the final remaining home of globally renowned philosopher Adam Smith. During his twelve-year tenancy between 1778 and 1790, he regularly hosted key luminaries of the Scottish Enlightenment to debate the most pressing issues at the brink of the first industrial revolution.

More than two hundred years later as the world grapples to avert environmental disaster by shifting to new energy sources while recovering from a global pandemic, the Hutton Series aims to recreate these ground-breaking discussions – both virtually and at the same historic location in Edinburgh's world heritage site.

Named after James Hutton – Smith's great friend and the father of modern geology – this series takes place across 2020-21 and brings together a diverse cross-section of experts, business leaders, scientists, and concerned citizens.

The opening session on 6 October leads with speeches by the environmental and polar scientist Professor Sir Ian Boyd, former chief scientist at DEFRA & member of SAGE, and the CEO of Natwest Group (formerly RBS), Alison Rose.

To get as many voices and opinions as possible, members of the public can submit real-time questions to the debate panels. Due to social distancing, this first event will be live-streamed and there will be options to attend follow-up workshops.

Professor Richard Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Heriot-Watt University said:

“When we opened Panmure House in 2018, our aim was not only to restore its bricks and mortar but its rightful place as a hothouse of global economic and social debate.

“As a place of learning, we can't shy away from the huge challenges that both business and society face to shift into climate-friendly territory. Achieving ambitious net zero-carbon targets will require radical thinking – which is why we've set up the Hutton Series to assemble a wide range of inspiring speakers to come up with exactly that.”

Professor John Ludden of the Lyell Centre, a strategic partnership between Heriot-Watt University and the British Geological Survey, the series coordinator, emphasised:

“We want to use our real-world industry links with science, business, engineering, and technology to assemble a range of voices to come up with fresh ideas. This includes a role for members of the public to pose searching questions and share their own thoughts. Considering how many people attend climate marches – we know these issues are highly relevant.”

Dr Caroline Howitt, Programme Director at Adam Smith's Panmure House added:

"There's no doubt that a global pandemic has injected extra complexity to our plans – not least because Panmure's 18th century proportions make social distancing a challenge – but these unprecedented times have also made us all the more committed to play our part in a very 21st-century kind of thought leadership.

"We look forward to welcoming people to Adam Smith's former home – both virtually and in person - to help shape the future of our global approach to climate change."

Professor Sir Ian Boyd added:

"In Adam Smith's time at Panmure House, discussion about the challenges of the day were largely the preserve of a few intellectuals but today they are a way of opening up public discourse on this difficult subject.

"The challenges of current times need a lot of agility to deal with because they are unlikely to abate. We need to adapt by deciding what we value and where our priorities lie."

Alison Rose, NatWest Group's CEO, said:

"Responding to climate change is the biggest challenge of past and present generations.

"We are determined to be a leading bank in the UK and ROI helping to address the climate challenge and are taking bold actions to drive the UK's transition to a low carbon economy.

"Heriot-Watt's forthcoming discussion series is an opportunity to look at the positive role universities, businesses and government can play in responding to the challenge and I'm delighted to be taking part in the debate."

Notes to Editor

In 2018, the former Prime Minister, The Rt Hon Gordon Brown, led the opening of Panmure House in Edinburgh's Canongate, once home to the economist Adam Smith. Led by Heriot-Watt's Edinburgh Business School, the Grade A listed building has been extensively renovated, providing a unique asset for the University, for the city of Edinburgh and for the wider community.

The Lyell Centre is a strategic partnership between Heriot-Watt University and the British Geological Survey, funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Scottish Funding Council and Heriot-Watt University. The partnership enables them to work together combining their expertise in land and marine geoscience.

More details on the first event here: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/research/lectures/the-hutton-series-on-climate-change.htm>

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