

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

Press release – for immediate release

Durham Book Festival makes the case for climate action ahead of COP26

As all eyes look to the UK ahead of COP26 (31 October – 12 November), writers, artists and audiences from around the world will be meeting at Durham Book Festival from 9-17 October, to make the people's case for climate action.

Durham Book Festival is a Durham County Council festival produced by New Writing North with major support from Durham University and Arts Council England.

This year's Durham Book Festival takes place both online and in-person, creating spaces for people to come together to discuss big ideas through books and new writing.

New Writing North declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. As part of its commitment to responding to the crisis, the literature development organisation commissions new work and runs reading and writing groups with its Climate Writer-in-Residence Linda France. New Writing North is also a member of the North East England Climate Coalition, which is working to make the region England's greenest.

The annual Durham Book Festival, taking place just weeks before COP26, offers a wide range of new writing, podcasts, events and activities to inspire, provoke and encourage action.

Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive of New Writing North, said: "Writers and arts organisations have a very useful role to play in helping us all begin to understand ourselves in relation to the existential challenge that the climate crisis presents to how we think, live and plan for the future. COP26 is a potentially great moment of positive change and we want all the writers and readers that we engage with to feel part of this moment. I'm proud that the work that we are presenting forefronts the voices of the public as well as many amazing writers – we are all in this together and need to come together around this moment of change."

Linda France, Climate Writer in Residence with New Writing North and Newcastle University, said: "Climate Change is happening here and now. It affects every aspect of every person's life on this planet. Reading and writing help spread the word, bring it home that it is personal and universal. We have no choice now but to take the climate emergency seriously and do whatever it takes to reduce carbon emissions, regenerate ecological systems and create a greener, fairer world. Do you want to be part of the problem or part of the solution? Speak up. Get involved. Do what you can."

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Cllr Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet member for economy and partnerships at Durham County Council, said: “We are delighted that climate change is a key theme at this year’s festival, as well as being a major focus of the Durham 2025 campaign, which aims to showcase the county’s amazing cultural offer.

“Durham County Council was one of the first local authorities in the country to declare a climate emergency and we are working hard to make County Durham carbon neutral by 2050.

“There is so much joy to be discovered in nature, and we all have a responsibility to look after the world around us. Arts and culture, particularly the written and spoken word, are powerful tools to spread these messages. They can also inspire us to connect with our environment in new and meaningful ways.”

The Climate Emergency activities at Durham Book Festival 2021 are:

New commission: IN OUR ELEMENT

In Our Element is a new 10-part podcast series by Linda France, produced by Sonderbug with New Writing North, in association with Newcastle University. As well as broadcasting from Durham Book Festival, it will run on Resonance FM and several local radio stations nationwide throughout October and November.

Is the climate crisis asking for radical system change and a change of hearts and minds? Does it reflect a crisis of the imagination, of consciousness, of global ethics? How might extracting, consuming, travelling and working less benefit our well-being as well as simply bringing down carbon emissions?

Across ten episodes, poet Linda France talks to activists, engineers, conservationists, academics, thinkers, poets and musicians around the world to hear their take on these questions. Her guests include Pulitzer Prize-winner Jorie Graham in North America, environmental activist John Kinsella in Western Australia and renowned Welsh language poet Menna Elfyn.

Available from 12 October on the Durham Book Festival website. Free to download.

New commission: DAWN CHORUS

‘Imagine that we have the chance to begin again. What kind of world would you want to wake up in?’ This was the question posed to the 100+ participants of Dawn Chorus, a collective sound poem created by poet Linda France, artist and film-maker Christo Wallers and an assembly of voices. Inspired by birdsong, Dawn Chorus is a morning chorus for a

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planet waking up to better times. Respondents from across the UK and internationally sent in their recorded lines and phrases, from which Linda and Christo have created a polyphonic soundscape.

Premieres at Durham Book Festival Online on 12 October and will be available on YouTube thereafter. Free to watch.

Festival event: BEGINNING AGAIN

Following the premiere of Dawn Chorus, Linda will be joined by Kate Simpson, editor of *Out of Time: Poetry from the Climate Emergency* for a free online festival event, to discuss how poetry and creativity can help us to make sense of the climate emergency.

12 October, 7.15-8.15pm, Durham Book Festival Online. Free to watch.

New commission: CARBON, CLIMATE AND RENEWAL: A SELF-GUIDED WALK OF THE DURHAM HERITAGE COAST

Set off on this newly commissioned self-guided literary walk and discover Durham's beautiful Heritage Coast.

Spend time walking in the lively harbour town of Seaham and along the Durham Heritage Coast enjoying the built and natural environment. Explore issues of climate change through the written word set against the backdrop of the former coal mining town, its surrounding landscape, seascape, and history.

This walk is created by Ruth Robson and includes material researched as part of Writing Durham, a partnership between Durham Book Festival and Durham University.

Available from 9 October on the Durham Book Festival website. Free to download.

Festival event: HOT AIR: CLIMATE CHANGE WITH PETER STOTT

Ours is the age of global warming. Rising sea levels, extreme weather, forest fires. Dire warnings are everywhere, so why has it taken so long for the crisis to be recognised?

Join Peter Stott as he reveals the bitter fight to get international recognition for what, among scientists, has been known for decades: human activity causes climate change. Across continents and against the efforts of sceptical governments, prominent climate change deniers and shadowy lobbyists, *Hot Air: The Inside Story of the Battle Against Climate Change* is the urgent story of how the science was developed, how it has been repeatedly

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sabotaged and why humanity hasn't a second to spare in the fight to halt climate change. Chaired by Professor Julie Sanders, Newcastle University.

10 October, 10-11am, Durham Book Festival Online. Tickets £5 or included in the £20 Digital Pass.

Workshop: BEYOND DYSTOPIA: WRITING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS WITH WASAFIRI MAGAZINE

What does it mean to write about the climate and environmental crisis? The answer depends so much on who, and where in the world, we are. To engage with environmental collapse, and its roots, requires an eye on both the local and global.

In this workshop, led by Wasafiri's Jessica Gaitán Johannesson and held on Zoom, we experiment with this double vision, starting with near, intimate locations and following their connections to distant places. Reframing current events in time and space, we seek to find our own voice, beyond warnings or dystopias.

13 October, 7-9pm, Durham Book Festival Online. Tickets £15/12 concessions.

To book tickets for Durham Book Festival visit www.durhambookfestival.com

To find out more about the Durham 2025 campaign, visit www.durham2025.co.uk

For all media enquiries please contact Laura Fraine laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com or call 07411 164 837 / 07840 254153

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