Prime Minister Boris Johnson hosted a Downing Street reception this week at which the British Fashion Council (BFC) set out its work to drive fashion to a more eco-focused future and called on the government to get more involved with a new sustainability programme that will require £80 million in funding.
Johnson indicated the government’s support and suggested the funding would be forthcoming.

Guests at the event included Anya Hindmarch, Farfetch’s Holli Rogers, Roksanda’s Jamie Gill, new Burberry CEO Jonathan Akeroyd, Justin Thornton and Thea Bregazzi, Stephen Jones and many more.

BFC chair Stephanie Phair said: “We have the power to address the need for change in consumer behaviour and the industrial transformation needed through business and critical societal interventions to meet the levelling up agenda, regeneration and skills.

“Over the last few years, we have been focused on developing a blueprint for a circular fashion eco-system for the UK, that will significantly reduce our impact on the planet, future-proof our industry and develop UK IP through design and innovation. We are here today to ask you to support this programme to go from theory to practice, from research to reality.

“To date, the fashion industry has not relied on government intervention, but today, industry and government — through targeted regulation and funding — need to partner for the future, and move from seeing the climate crisis as risk-management to an opportunity for development and prosperity across the UK.”

She cited figures that showed just how tough the targeted 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and net zero emissions no later than 2050 will be to achieve.

She said 4 billion items of clothing were bought in the UK alone in 2019, with approximately 80 billion globally, and “at least 60% will never be recycled”.

Clothing production has doubled in the last 15 years and fashion is the third-largest polluting industry on the planet.

Phair talked about the BFC’s 10-year Fashion Industry Sustainable Change Programme, “focused on creating a world leading circular fashion eco-system in the UK with innovation and creativity front and centre”.

And she said the programme “outlines the need for the first industry-led Centre of Excellence”, housed within the Institute of Positive Fashion “to convene industry including designers, retailers, manufacturers, academia and broader stakeholders”.

She cited research undertake by the BFC and partner bodies that has produced evidence for “a 10-year Industrial Change Programme with innovation at its core” that will require an estimated £80 million in funding.

Phair added: “The Fashion Industry is a big part of the problem, so we must be a big part of the solution and the solutions need to be bold and wide-reaching. And we believe we have a path towards this. We need to address how we design, how we source, how we produce, how we ship, how we market product, how we shop and how we deal with waste that currently goes to landfill. We can’t do this within the current structures and practices of our industry.”

By Sandra Halliday

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