



Climate Emergency Support

Parish and Town Councils

climateguide

Planning a climate emergency communications campaign

A communications plan for the climate emergency will need to reach all sections of your community and so you will need to think about who those audiences are, what 'channels' they tend to use to get their information from, and what kinds of messages will resonate with them.

A good communications plan tells stories, rather than just attempting to communicate facts, and is about dialogue, not monologue. As a parish council, it's likely you're a small organisation without any committed communications officer in your budget. You may well find that you can recruit local volunteers to help run a climate communications campaign for you, or you may decide you have sufficient budget for hiring someone part time, or contracting this out. To do that, you'll need to build an idea of what you want from the campaign, with content being produced several times a month.

You'll want to build a calendar of engagement, spread over 2-3 years. Do some digging into national campaigns that will be happening, and programme them in so that you can amplify those messages and tie it to local information (for example, things like Community Energy Fortnight, National Vegetarian Week and similar campaigns around energy saving, water saving, tree planting and so on).

Then think about the themes that you want to talk to your community about. These should be based on the things we need to change in society that will have the biggest and most immediate impact on our carbon emissions. (You might be tempted to include something about cutting plastic, but be aware that the plastic pollution crisis is somewhat separate to the climate crisis and is not in itself a key driver of carbon emissions).

Example themes you could use are:

- *reducing household energy use*
- *getting our energy from renewable sources*
- *massively reducing our reliance on private cars for transport,*
- *altering our diets*
- *stopping flying*
- *reduce, re-use, recycle*

There are six themes here – that's neat because it fits neatly into a calendar. Let's say you are planning a 3-year programme. An example table on the next page shows how you could programme in a base calendar, which returns to each of these key themes at regular intervals over the three year period. You might want to jiggle it about a bit to fit any national campaigns, but in essence, the table has you returning to each theme around 12 times each over the three months, and doing some comms around two different themes in each calendar month. So that's a story or linking to some other initiative about once every other week.

		reducing household energy use	getting our energy from renewable sources	massively reducing our reliance on private cars	altering our diets	stopping flying	reduce, re-use and recycle
Year 1	Jan						
	Feb						
	March						
	April						
	May						
	Jun						
	Jul						
	Aug						
	Sept						
	Oct						
	Nov						
	Dec						
Year 2	Jan						
	Feb						
	March						
	April						
	May						
	Jun						
	Jul						
	Aug						
	Sept						
	Oct						
	Nov						
	Dec						
year 3	Jan						
	Feb						
	March						
	April						
	May						
	Jun						
	Jul						
	Aug						
	Sept						
	Oct						
	Nov						
	Dec						

The crucial thing is to plan to talk to different parts of your community when you touch on a theme several times. So, the first time you talk about changing the way we travel, it might be about getting kids to cycle and walk to school. This would be written and aimed at parents and young people. Whereas when you touch on this theme again, you might have a real push on something relating to households with more than one car. Depending on where your community is based, it might be appropriate to promote the idea of something like electric cargo bikes to replace a second or third household car. Or it might be something about car-sharing and car clubs, and finding out if there is an appetite for that locally. You might then also do a general story on the need for more travelling by bike, and use your transport theme one month as an opportunity to call for evidence from the community about where they think cycle infrastructure is needed. So, although you'll be returning to the theme of 'getting people out of their cars' 12 times, don't worry about thinking people will be bored of hearing the same thing, as you'll be talking about it in different ways, and to different groups.

And you can use a spreadsheet populated with a table like this to note down not only who your key audience is for your communications about transport this month, but also where you will promote this – what channels will you use? Facebook? the local paper? The school newsletter? That will depend on who you want the message to reach.

Key rules for the climate messages

- Don't use a preachy or hectoring tone
- Don't be too generic. If you try to give advice and information that is 'one-size-fits-all' you will end up talking to nobody. It's far better to target your communications, knowing that many people won't read it but those who it is aimed at will get the more tailored information they need.
- Don't use 'tribal' labels. Instead of referring to 'cyclists' and 'motorists' (which sets up a dichotomy and makes it feel as if it's one against the other), talk more about making sure people can 'choose to cycle'. Position change as providing choice, not taking away a right.

- Talk about changing *behaviours*, not *identities*. There's a world of difference between how someone will view the message 'become a vegan' and the message 'eat vegan meals much more often'. The former speaks of a label that one would use to identify oneself; the latter is merely a behaviour that one engages in.
- Don't feel you need to explain or justify climate science – make clear that it's a given that the parish council is completely aligned with the need to reduce emissions very rapidly.
- Find space every time to stress the co-benefits of the actions you're suggesting. An example list of co-benefits is in the box below.
- Link to trusted sources of information – there are loads of charities, as well as government funded websites and schemes, you don't need to reinvent the wheel.

Co-Benefits of climate action

When you're asking local residents to change their behaviours, always make sure it's positively worded and stresses why this will be good for them and the wider community. Examples of co-benefits that could come from different climate actions are:

Lower bills | cleaner air | warmer homes in winter | cooler homes in summer | better green spaces | more street trees | less congested streets | reduced pavement parking | reduced car clutter in our town centre | supporting the local agricultural economy | relieving pressure on the NHS | new jobs in the green economy | supporting local tradespeople | more affordable transport for local people

Thinking about audiences, channels and messages

To think about how you will target your messages, you will need to think about the audiences that exist in your community, and then think about the channels they use to communicate and receive their news, and the messages that they are most likely to want to spread and most likely to want to receive.

Let's start with **audiences**. One audience might be 'parents with young children', and another might be 'local business owners'. You might also have 'affluent home owners', 'low income families' and so on. Audiences also overlap. Somebody can be interested in one thing as a parent of young children, but have different channels that they use as a business owner.

Then we might think about the **channels** each of our audiences is likely to use. Traditional or social media? Specific social media platforms? Peer networks, local newspaper, advertising in the local shop or GP, trade press etc. How might you bring information on household energy saving to a low-income mum in your community? It's going to be a different place (and different advice) than you might give to a wealthy, professional home-owner.

And finally, think about the **message, and the messenger**. Your climate communications campaign can't just be based around putting across facts. It must also include calls to action, and be linked to how a proposed action will make the message recipient's life better in some way. And it might be that your parish council is not the most trusted messenger for some topics. Imagine you wanted to get wealthy homeowners to switch their investments to ethical funds and pensions. You don't want to pretend you know all about that – but you might instead write a piece promoting the work of a trusted journalist in the Financial Times who would be trusted by that kind of audience.