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2021 Hounslow Schools Climate Conference

Questions & Answers

The Green School for Girls: What made you so concerned about the environment?

Alison Lakey: I have always loved the natural world and probably do with school as there was amazing groups and an amazing pond-club, studying bugs and all. I did Geography A Level and we learned about the greenhouse gas effect and the damage that humans are doing to the planet and that really affected me. I have always tried to live my life to make the least damage possible as a result of that education.

The Green School for Girls: Who do you think can make more effective changes to our local areas or country overall.

Alison Lakey: Grown-ups make the choices, as you know, but with children as the future, you have to think for yourselves and not be told by adults what is right and what is wrong. You have to question and challenge us all the time. You have to know what you want to do to make a difference and then as Gandhi said, if you want to change the world, you start with yourself. As far as I'm concerned, it's down to the children because I'm sure you feel very angry with adults for messing up the world and making it the state it's in.

St. Mark's Catholic School: Do you think we can be hopeful about the future of climate change?

Alison Lakey: I think we can be really hopeful. Your generation is so creative, so dynamic, so different. I truly think we can be hopeful. We have to be optimistic and have to be innovative. We can do that but we have to pull together at a local, national and global level. We have to stop fighting and remove focus on the profit motive as this is what is damaging our green ideas and I think your generation can do it.

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1

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[Chat comment] The Green School for Girls: *Thank you Alison for answering our question. We aim to be that generation that makes a change, but there is only so much we can do as young people. Time is running out, the international community needs to act NOW!*

Lampton School: In your opinion do you think all countries are doing all they can to lower carbon emissions?

Councillor Dunne: At the moment I don't think that they are doing enough and it is obvious that most countries could be doing more to lower their carbon emissions. We need to make some radical changes to do this. I do agree with Alison that there are lots of reasons to be hopeful but it is going to take a bigger change than we've seen so far.

We have seen children getting involved in activism action around the world, and I know that locally you have been getting involved with making changes in your own schools, which is fantastic. It's partly about local action and about the pressure - keeping your voices heard of what you want to see from grown-ups.

We're going to have to get rid of coal-powered electricity stations for example, and really think about the way that we get around. Whilst we have a big programme in Hounslow around putting in electric vehicle charging infrastructure, that is only part of the solution. When we talk to young people about active travel – getting around using your own power (walking, scooting, cycling) - we see that young people are really interested and understand the reasons for doing it. We need to see that shift in a much bigger way than we've seen so far.

Brentford School for Girls: Is there a way that plastic recycling could be made free in schools in Hounslow? We know recycling isn't as good as reusing or refusing but is still an issue that we need help with.

Alison Lakey: Well, the good news that plastic recycling is free for schools in Hounslow. We're also able to recycle paper and cardboard and now, they're going to introduce food waste recycling. We separate our bins in school and children are educated to know which bins to put them into. And we also try to not use plastic in the first place so lots of events and other things in school are now plastic free.

A great place to start is to get an eco-team in school (if you haven't already). Normally each class has one or two representatives voted in. They can do litter picks, make a kitchen garden, put bird houses into their schools, all sorts of things. This can then expand out to other children and then to parents. If anyone wants any help, please do contact me and I'd be very happy to respond via email.

[Chat comment] Contact Alison Lakey at Belmont School. *Please do get in touch if you think your school could be doing more and you need to help to do so. We have a lot of experience and contacts and we can help. You are all amazing and so switched on. Keep up the good work.*

Isleworth & Syon: As students who consistently experience low-flying airliners over our school, can we ask whether there has been a guarantee on not building Heathrow Runway 3.

[Chat comment] St. Mark's Catholic School: *Isleworth and Syon we agree with your Heathrow expansion question, we are equally affected.*

Steven Wilding: This is a very good question and is very impactful and pertinent to yourselves. We're going to live with that and the impacts in the area. It's fair to say that there is no guarantee that the



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third runway will not be built. The questions gets to the tension that we have around the environmental agenda. On the negative side, we know that excessive flying is contributing to climate change and there are lots of environmental negatives. The reality is that when the decisions are made, this is balanced against other aspects. The case for a third runway was also in part around the economic side and it was deemed important for the growth of the wider UK economy, bringing in goods and people tied to the global economy and we need those transport links.

Because of the impact of the pandemic and the drop in passenger numbers – it will take a while for them to return to previous levels – there is a reduced case for a third runway right now, but when this question arises again it will be about being honest and understanding the negative and positives aspects. If it does go ahead, we have a responsibility to ensure we have the maximum mitigation in place. What I mean by that is having limits on numbers of flight and flying hours, seeing if they can avoid certain routes over houses, and can we think about the future of aviation fuels making them cleaner.

Lampton School: Would the 3rd runway be ethical rather than destroying all the agriculture as well as residential zones?

Steven Wilding: I think I would agree that ethics does come into it. We as adults do need to do the right thing to give you as young people the maximum chance and number of options to get the best out of things. We can potentially make unethical choices that narrow your options for how you want to live on the planet.

There is also a pragmatic aspect to big questions and there's a process referred to called 'Judicial Review'. Controversial projects like Heathrow third runway, or HS2 can be taken to court, but if we're honest the courts aren't making decisions based on ethics as such but based on a legal framework. Once it's down a certain path, they can only work with the rules that are established for that particular

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4

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process or institution. So, our responsibility is to make sure we have the legal framework in place based on good ethics so that the process takes into account the ethical points.

[Chat comment] Steven Wilding: *It's a significant problem. But the airport also provides local jobs and economic growth. So we need firm environmental mitigation to keep pollution and other negative environmental impacts to the absolute minimum but it's difficult at this point to eliminate entirely. Research and clean tech will be important to make more aviation cleaner and greener. Thanks.*

Councillor Dunne: Air pollution is very closely linked in some ways with climate change although carbon emissions don't affect us directly, they cause global warming which have effects on the environment. Lots of other emissions – from vehicles and industrial processes and burning fuels to heat our homes, bonfires, even cooking - have a direct impact on our health. This is why we're very keen on cleaning up our air. This is a real issue across London and nation-wide.

Many of you will have heard of the Ultra Low Emissions Zone ([ULEZ](#)) and this has been extended and now comes into parts of our borough now. This seeks to eliminate the most polluting vehicles from our roads. Here in Hounslow we welcome the expansion and would like to see this extended to the whole of the borough. We are not going to wait for that, however, and are encouraging people a) to use cleaner vehicles where they can b) use alternatives where we can.

All our schools do have active travel plans, and this encourages walking and use of public transport. Public transport is becoming 'cleaner' and also caters for a bigger number of people per vehicle. We take it seriously and we have lots of air quality monitoring stations around, which might be interesting for you to look at. The results of this monitoring are all posted on-line and you can look at them and compare [air quality](#) around the borough. Of course, we are very concerned about levels around schools, and are taking action. Many of you may have School Streets scheme in place at your schools which restricts access by vehicles at the important times as you are coming in and out of school.

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Gunnersbury Catholic School: What are your opinions on the flooding that occurred recently?

Councillor Dunne: Flooding is a sign that we need to take climate change really seriously. There has always been flooding but what we're seeing now is an increase in the incidence in UK and world-wide. This fits the pattern of climate change where we're seeing an increase in extreme weather and heat. We are going to see more of it in the UK. London is very low-lying and we're on a river so we're at risk and this will only increase, so flooding is a sign of how seriously we need to take climate change.

[Chat comment] Michila Critchley: *Interested to see a BBC news report on the increased number of times the Thames Barrier has been used in recent years.*

See also:

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/risk-and-uncertainty-calculating-the-thames-barriers-future>

<https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2018/11/13/holding-back-the-tide/>

[Chat comment] Steven Wilding: *Very interesting piece on the Thames Barrier. I used to work for the Environment Agency. Careful management is required to limit barrier closures so the barrier lasts without failure until its replacement is due. A real challenge as climate change causes more extreme weather events which require barrier closure to prevent loss of life and damage to property.*

Rivers Academy: Is there possible external help from the council to work with students to improve green skills and teach us more strategies? @ Steven Wilding?

Steven Wilding: Again, a good question. Whilst the Council is leading and doing a lot in terms of the Green Recovery, we can't do it, and it's not correct for the Council to do it, on our own. We are working with partners to make sure we're utilising the best expertise in the area. For instance, on the Green Skills-side we are working with West London College on a funding bid linked to the Greater London Authority (umbrella authority) for an academies-based programme. We are looking also into an academy in our own borough.

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There is also a role for central government. They are looking at options around influencing apprenticeships so that they are more tailored to the green skills required now and for the future. This then links to what we do at the local level, and the money we can access from central government that can be accessed for what we want to do locally.

Gunnersbury Catholic School: What is the councils plan to add renewable energy into the borough?

Councillor Dunne: We are investing in renewable energy. The one thing we have already done is switched all of our electricity in our Council buildings to renewable energy suppliers. There needs to be an increase in the amount of energy produced from renewable green sources in order for everyone to be able to do that.

One of the biggest challenges that we have is that a lot of our council housing and buildings are heated by gas and this is very environmentally unfriendly. There are two things we can do: one is we can remove the gas and replace them something else. At the moment, this is hugely expensive and you will be aware that councils don't have a huge amount of money for this sort of thing. We do have some excellent teams that are very good at bidding for money but this is one of the challenges that we have as a Council. I'd love it if we could say to central government that this is what we need to meet our Net Zero targets, and just put in for money. Unfortunately it doesn't work like this, and we have to take time and effort to submit bids against other councils although we all have the same goals and it's all for the good of the country.

The other thing we can do is to make those homes and buildings more energy efficient so that they don't need that energy in the first place. When you put in insulation where buildings already exist, it is called 'retro-fitting' and there is a big programme throughout London for retrofitting buildings. We are getting going on that with school buildings, council buildings and other corporate buildings and hopefully council housing as well. We also need individual home-owners to be involved. I think everyone might have heard about the group Insulate Britain – they have some controversial methods but what

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they are asking the government to do is absolutely right. We need to insulate homes across Britain if we are going to bring that energy use down.

Isleworth & Syon: How do you plan to make public transport more accessible in Hounslow?

Steven Wilding: Some of the initiatives we're looking at that Councillor Dunne touched on: we want to increase the range of options available for travel regardless of where you are in the borough. We recognise that there are some parts where there are less options, perhaps if you're going to compare east to west. We need to work across the whole suite of options:

- Active travel in terms of cycle ways, and feeling safe and enjoyable so that cycling is an attractive option.
- Pedestrian connectivity is a question, particularly where places are broken up by main roads, how do you make that connectivity so that it is safe and attractive to walk from one area to another.
- E-cargo bikes is another option: you might want to walk or use public transport but it impractical with a load of shopping – this is an option as they have larger storage capacity and you can speed up your point-to-point journey.
- In terms of increasing bus availability, inclusivity and accessibility and other forms of rapid transport, we have to work with Transport for London and Central Government who have that wider authority and bigger sums of money to work at a larger scale.

[Chat comment] Gunnersbury Catholic School: *We agree with Isleworth & Syon because at the moment public transport is not appealing to access and many people would rather walk if they didn't need to take it as its not cleaned often and if you smack a seat dust comes out and the buses have rubbish left on them and aren't taken out.*

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