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2021 Cheltenham Schools Climate Conference

Questions & Answers

Churchdown School: Do you do the same in your personal life as you do with your job? And how do you make these conversions affordable for those that can't afford to make them?

James Clarke: So yeah, of course I do stuff in my personal life that that we advise people to do. But of course everybody's house is different, so what you're able to do is different and the way you use your energy is different. In my house I've got little smart plugs that (via your phone) you can switch things on and switch things off and all that sort of thing. Basically every light in the house is timed by that and it's beautiful because in the evenings it's got this lovely little glow. It feels cosy but it's not wasting a load of energy during the day and it switches off with the sunrise and the sunset, so it's really quite clever so you never have the lights on when the sun's out and you never sit in the darkness because it's a dark day or anything like that.

There's a big issue with how do you make changes that reduce carbon emissions but are really expensive to make. At Severn Wye one of the things that we do is to try and channel government money to people who need it most, who struggle to be able to afford to make changes to their homes to be more energy efficient. We aim that people who can't do that are helped by funding that we can offer. That might be to improve the insulation of their home. It might be to put an air source heat pump in or something like that. Gradually those pots of money are becoming more and more available so that more and more people can make changes even if they don't have loads of cash.

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Stroud High School: Do you come into schools as well as businesses and if so how do you help them?

James Clarke: For many years we have been going into schools to help people like yourselves to spot some of the things within the school. You think, wait a minute those lights don't look particularly energy efficient or this room is really cold and we've got a couple of heaters that are on all of the time, that sort of thing. Sometimes those of you that use your schools are the best people to be able to identify just what the issues are and just where the solutions might be. For a number of years we've been running a program called 'Our Future People' and what that is, is we go into schools and we have a team of students just like you. Over the course of a year the students will be able to spot things over the school, make recommendations to the governors and the leadership in the school and their head teachers. We help them make changes to their school that the pupils have spotted that needs to change. We try and help you to be influencers in your own schools.

Pate's Grammar: Have you experienced any change in attitudes towards climate change?

Isabella Kaminski: That is an awesome question. Yes, I think attitudes have changed enormously over the last 10 years. When I started writing about climate change, there was still quite a lot of climate denial going on, people were actively saying look this isn't real, or throwing a lot of scepticism into the mix. I think a lot of that has changed. It hasn't gone away. There's still big parts of the US, for example, where people don't believe climate change is real. The attitude has usually changed and the conversation shifted to more how are we going to address this? I think sort of from a government and Council point of view, it's all been taken much more seriously, at least in words. When you look at surveys of the public, people are much more concerned and aware than they used to be. I think that's for many reasons. In the



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last couple of years, Extinction Rebellion have actually had a huge role in that. I think they've shown how much support there is from the public and shone a really big spotlight as to what hasn't been happening. We're still not doing enough to match climate change, but there's a huge amount more awareness and the problems being taken much more seriously. The actions being taken at governments and councils and businesses are not even close to being enough to actually address climate change yet, so there's still a lot more needed for people to push for change, for real change to happen.

Cleeve School: Where do you get the funding to support local people?

Raechel Kelly: To just answer that really quickly: we're hoping to get some grant funding. From big charity foundations and things like that. We've got a small amount of seed funding from the Borough Council, which is fantastic. The main thing that we're going to be doing is running a crowd funder, hopefully. The brilliance of that is that if everybody gives a little bit, it adds up to quite a lot. Our plan is to hopefully use that. And then also it's [Planet Cheltenham] community owned as well as community run so everybody feels like they kind of can be a part of it.

Follow @planetchelt on Twitter and @planetcheltenhaminsta on instagram too!

Raechel's twitter feed is @raechel_kelly.

Pate's Grammar School: How can we help make Cheltenham more cycle friendly?

Bex Mountford: I think everybody just getting out on their bike more. More cyclists on the road really helps. I think I'm talking to your school to see if they can help with bike racks or bike buses to help people get to school. Talk to your local councillors and ask them to put in safe cycling routes for you. And I guess badger your parents to go out on rides with you and things like that as well. Just look at all little tricks that you could do. You know - going to the shops - can you manage to go and get what you want on your bike instead of driving to the shops?

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Things like that. I think the more cycling we see, the more people realise, oh, that's an option for me too. Maybe I can go and do that. Wherever we can, just do it.

Any plans in the future about areas of Cheltenham being bike only?

Bike only areas would be great. However we have to be careful we aren't limiting access to those who need to drive due to disabilities etc. I think there are places we could limit car access though, like closing the end of one road and stopping it being a through route.

Can we have a dedicated and separate bike lane?

More cycling infrastructure would be great. Gloucester County Council are slowly building more of this. I think also increasing the number of cyclists will help us all feel safer. Since covid-19 hit, cycling has increased and it does feel nicer cycling with other cyclists about. Hopefully more led cycling rides will help too.

Pate's Grammar School: Is the [Council] investment strategy big enough?

Max Wilkinson: Inevitably it won't be big enough. The trouble that councils have had is that our budgets have been cut to basically zero by the government. So we have difficulty because we want to do an awful lot more but we just don't have the resources. What we can do is put in place policies in our existing 'business as usual' activities to make sure that we are pointing things in the right direction. This is why we need to get our planning rules in place properly and our licensing rules in place in terms of our investment strategy. We think that we're going to be able to announce about £10 million to invest in good green projects that will probably make a commercial return too. Of course on the other side, there will be an awful lot of stuff that we need to do that's going to make no commercial return. For those projects, we'll be bidding to government for funding most of the time. The government says, we've got £700 million for the whole country or something, and Cheltenham Borough Council can perhaps expect to get £500,000 or so. That might cover a deep retrofit of council houses (maybe up to 60) and we

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have four and a half thousand council houses that we need to deep retrofit and change the energy sources for, so that puts it into perspective exactly what we've got to deal with there.

There are some really interesting big projects that we're investigating at the moment. In terms of energy, we're looking at whether we can have a heat network in Cheltenham, which will be really important. Again, we have to bid to the government to get their help to install that because it's going to be a project that is rolled out over many years into the future. Some of the pupils at today's conference might end up working on such projects in the future because there's going to be huge demand for the skills and resources to implement those kind of projects. We do have an absolutely gargantuan challenge and I'm clear as much as everyone else on the panel that we can never do enough. We don't have enough resources to do it, and we can't go fast enough. This is why there's a really important role for people who aren't involved in public sector, to keep agitating more and by writing to their MP's, by writing to government ministers, and by protesting in the streets which is really important.

What Isabella said about Extinction Rebellion and the way that we can move the debate forward, is actually by being awkward and by making sure that when people are being awkward and they're making lives difficult for others on an everyday basis, we don't just react by saying that's outrageous, I've been delayed by 5 minutes on my way to work. Actually, I think Extinction Rebellion has proven that that's the way that you move the debate on. There are ways to do it, of course, and it's important that we don't alienate people. But when protest is happening by people like Extinction Rebellion, or Tolly, sitting in the shop window in H&M, it's for a good reason, because this is the single biggest thing that's impacting everyone in our country and in Cheltenham. As we know in Cheltenham we're on the frontline. It floods a lot so we can't ignore it and Cheltenham's going to end up flooded badly in future. If we don't act a

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lot faster, Cheltenham will be flooded more severely. Tewksbury will be flooded even worse and the people who will be impacted the worst will inevitably be the poorest. Richer people will be able to move away from areas that are subject to flooding and that's not an acceptable way of going about anything.

The agitation bit is really important and the agitation must be on the basis that bad things need to stop. For example, large airport expansion and investment in lots of roads because that's bad for the environment. At the same time and what you need to be agitating for is more money to be put into worthy projects because it's very easy to look at the numbers that the government puts out in terms of where we're unveiling - a billion pounds or £2 billion, or £3 billion funds for projects XY&Z. It's never going to be enough and we need more. At the same time we need the government to legislate to stop large companies investing in fossil fuels and stop public sector subsidies for fossil fuel as well. There's an awful lot behind all this. We're never going to be able to do enough, but we will be able to do more, provided people keep agitating and making a fuss.

Stroud High School: What can big fashion brands do to make their items more sustainable?

Tolly Gregory: They can stop producing so much! One of the biggest issues with fast-fashion is scale. We need to rapidly reduce how many planetary resources we're using, especially when fashion is so wasteful. 'Hot Take', 'Drilled' & 'Idealistically' are great podcasts to listen to, too! I might be a bit biased about that last one! Tolly's twitter feed is @tolmeia.

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Additional points:

James Clarke:

1. Have a relationship with your energy and be interested in what you use
2. Think about the big changes you can make: can you cycle instead of drive to school? Can you take the bus? Can you convince your parents to choose a hybrid or electric vehicle next time they change their car?

YOU ARE INFLUENCERS.

Isabella Kaminski:

To add to the list of good, accessible news about climate I'd recommend the Guardian, Wired, Vice, Earther and Teen Vogue. And if you're finding it all a bit too grim, Positive News and Yes! magazine are great for a more optimistic viewpoint.

Raechel Kelly: Good sources of information on social media - Carbon Brief, Force of Nature, BBC bitesize - also follow all the people on the panel about local action!

Peter Clegg: Also checkout: @cleevelyev all you need to know about electric cars.

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