



InterClimate
Network

2021 Cheltenham Schools Climate Conference

Panel Speeches

- Raechel Kelly
- James Clarke
- Tolly Gregory
- Isabella Kaminski
- Bex Mountford
- Councillor Max Wilkinson

Raechel Kelly - Vision 21 & Planet Cheltenham.



“I am a local mum of three living in Cheltenham and am a freelance sustainability consultant. The main project that I’m working on at the moment is called Planet Cheltenham with Vision21. We create Cheltenham’s first community Climate Action Hub, where we will be doing things like events, workshops and skill shares. We have a Library of Things project, a Community Fridge network, and most importantly our Climate Youth Group for 16-24 years olds every other Wednesday.

Why are we focusing on Community climate action when the projects are so global? We have to ‘*Think Global but Act Local*’. The statistics from a survey by the Carbon Literacy in relation to the 6th Carbon Budget show that 60% of those recommendations require some sort of individual action. We need to start working with local residents at a hyper-local level to really engage with people around climate.

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My view is that you can either be overwhelmed by the problems or fall in love with the solutions. The types of solutions we're talking about are more than just carbon reduction, it's also community resilience to climate change.

Why have we started with the youth group? Of a survey of 10,000 young people around the world, 75% said the future was frightening because of climate change. Young people are constantly told that they give us hope but actually I think that it is grown-ups' responsibility to support young people in climate action and give them hope instead."

James Clarke - Severn Wye Energy Agency



"We are a really local charity here in Gloucestershire and focus on helping people make practical changes to the way that they use energy. Some of those changes will benefit you today and some will reduce emissions so that they will benefit everyone in the future. In particular we promote and encourage people and businesses to help reduce the energy they use, avoid electricity that they don't need to be using, and use it more efficiently and make greener and more low-carbon energy choices.

We do this with households, for example at home we might help you to put on timers so that you avoid energy use when you're asleep or out, or we might help you to put on or switch your lights to LED. We might help you to change your energy provider to being green so that you are helping to pump more renewable energy into our electricity grid in the UK. For businesses, for instance we might help a pub to change their cellar so that instead of chilling the beer and wine, helping them to switch off when it's cold enough. We help them to change their gas cookers to hyper-efficient induction hobs, and maybe to

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add solar panels to the roof so they can switch from using the carbonised grid to generating electricity on site for their business.

There's a bunch of different sustainability organisations working on climate change that you'll come across. Some of them are great at lobbying government to do more to stop climate change. You might be familiar with Extinction Rebellion. Some are great at building a grassroots movement of people who are passionate and committed to living in a sustainable way and Vision21 and Planet Cheltenham are really, really good at that and I'd encourage you to get involved. We [Severn Wye Energy] are somewhere in the middle. We like to roll up our sleeves and do some practical things that help you at home and in businesses. Also when governments have decided to make changes, we like to help them spend their money in the best possible way to benefit us now and for the future."

Tolly Gregory - Climate Justice activist and artist



"I am 21 and I am from Cheltenham so am very local. I am a Climate Justice Activist and Artist. Most of the time I'm focused on the climate crisis and doing as much as I can. I do lots of different things with my activism. Making it fun and engaging, as much as I can do, especially with young people. I grew up wanting to be a fashion designer and a few years into this, I started to learn about the impacts of the fashion industry and that really opened my eyes to the problems and why the climate crisis needed my attention. I now no longer see myself going into fashion but see myself as wanting to change not only the fashion industry but the world as a whole.

In terms of local things to do with fashion, I've been involved with a couple of things recently. One was Planet Cheltenham and I've been part of their Youth Climate Group. I've also been part of organising a free shop with Extinction Rebellion. I think this is a cool concept that can be used by anyone. It is part of

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the gifting economy, with the idea that we don't need to do things for money but can sustainably offer up things that we already have. I've also taken direct action locally. Recently I sat in the shop window of H&M branch in the high street along with my friend as they had a window display that was basically 'green-washing', trying to make them look more sustainable than they really are. We had lots of placards and stuff up and the next day the window display was removed so our High Street was free of H&M's greenwashing which I was quite proud of. So yeah, I get involved with lots of different things locally and I really think, as Rachel mentioned, as a young person I can try my best to ensure that I'm not just being used as a symbol of hope and that I can challenge older people and the older generations to actually take action on behalf of myself and young people like yourself."

Isabella Kaminski - Journalist



"I'm a freelance journalist. I've been writing about the environment, climate change for about 13 years now. I sort of specialized in environmental law and regulation. It's looking at how governments set of laws and policies and rules so that everybody else has to comply and reduce their emissions, or provide green transport. Over that time I've been writing about what governments are doing, I've become increasingly, I guess, sceptical that they're not doing nearly enough. It's not just me who feels that, so my writing more recently has been looking at people who've flipped the story the other way round, and they're using the law to force governments and companies into action because they don't think they're doing enough. That's quite local level, for example people who are taking their council to court because the council declared a climate emergency, but they're not actually doing anything. The council has suggested that there is an emergency, but they're not using all the powers to match that. Or people who are increasingly successfully taking their governments to court and saying, actually you've promised to do this and cut emissions by this much but you're not doing that.

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The wonderful thing about this is that people are winning: they're using their legal, political and social power to effect real change. Earlier this year, a group of NGOs actually took Shell to court in Holland, and Shell have been forced to cut their emissions. It was ordinary people who made that happen. I think that the law is a really interesting way that people can get involved. Increasingly young people are doing that as well. I wrote earlier this year about a group of young people who are trying to take the government to court. Basically saying you've declared there's a climate emergency, you say you want to be Net 0 by 2050, but you're not doing anything that matches that. That particular case I don't think it's going to win. But I know that another case also with young people is going to be coming again, so people are going to try and they will eventually win. And so yes, it's a really interesting kind of tool for people to take climate action."

Bex Mountford - Bicycle Mayor



I'm Cheltenham's first bicycle mayor, which has nothing to do with the actual mayor. This is an initiative from the Netherlands; we're based all around the world. We've got bicycle mayors in America and India and all over the place representing cycling progress and interests of the Community. We all do different things based on what's most needed in our communities. I've only been in the role for a couple of months. Just been looking at where I can be most useful and so I'm hoping that I can help accelerate the change we need to see by talking to residents, current cyclists and those who want to start cycling. We're in the process of setting up a Cheltenham Joyriders group, and there's already a very successful London joyriders. We will be doing women family friendly rides for new and nervous riders, and then progressing to longer and longer rides and to get people confident to go out cycling.

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I also spend my time talking to local councillors about infrastructure change. For example I've got a meeting on Saturday about a barrier across the path that some people with cargo bikes or bikes with trailers or wheelchairs find it hard to navigate. And the only alternative is to go round. Either a very busy route on your bike or to drive so you know just looking at things where we can change. Change a journey a week or more just to get people out on bikes and have a few less cars on the streets.”

Councillor Max Wilkinson - Cheltenham Borough Council



“Today people have spoken about how they're involved and how they got involved in environmental matters. My form of activism was by standing for election and getting elected and then agitating from within the system. Cheltenham Borough Council, the wider borough and hopefully Gloucestershire County Council start to take this issue more seriously, and it's obviously very timely that we discussed this at the time when our international leaders are taking part in discussions in Glasgow. This is a matter that is international, national and local too.

One of the things that we said when we declared a climate emergency in Cheltenham was that we wanted more power and money devolved to local areas. More devolved power to councils like Cheltenham Borough Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council and Stroud District Council means that those areas have more money and power to actually do stuff to make a change. I can tell you little bit about what Cheltenham's done since we declared our climate emergency. We've got in planning [permission] now for our first ever Carbon Neutral Council houses, which is really important. There's a planning application for for 24 council homes in Swindon Road. And while we're doing that, we're retrofitting other existing council houses cause some of them are really old and draughty touching on some of the points that James is making. Early on in the New Year, we're going to be putting in place our nine year detailed plan for how Cheltenham Borough Council can become carbon neutral as a Council, but also

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hopefully how the borough can become carbon neutral. Next week we're publishing our most thorough study of the Council's carbon footprint ever, setting new high standards, looking across scopes 1, 2 and 3 so that covers all the stuff that the Council buys from its suppliers as well, which is really important. This means we can then put pressure on companies that are providing services for us and ask them to start reporting their emissions, therefore creating a bit of a virtuous cycle.

We've implemented smart metering at all our Council premises, which hopefully will cut our energy use by around 1/4. We're putting in place a new air quality plan to cover the whole borough very soon. Even though Cheltenham air quality in general is good, it's really important that we have a specific focus on air quality around schools and in areas where you might be walking to school. We've put in place lots of new wildflower meadows in our parks as well. Next spring we're going to be approving new planning guidance and to make sure that we are asking for more from developers when they're coming to Cheltenham and building houses. We've published a plan for sustainable transport in Cheltenham: the 'Connecting Cheltenham Report'.

Despite the fact that we're doing all of this, (and the Borough Council realizes that we can't do it all on our own) your local Council sadly only has so much power and so much money. We recognize that we have a role to lead a debate and lead a discussion across the borough. We've set up the Cheltenham 0 partnership with Vision 21 and that's going to bring together the businesses in Cheltenham alongside the public sector and also community groups to plan it gently. We're going to enable knowledge of things: such as how you decarbonize your draughty old houses or draughty old business premises. This information, along with other things, will be shared as widely as possible. We're also putting in place in the new year our climate investment strategy, which will mean that we're able to invest in sustainable energy sources within Cheltenham. That might mean that we can pay for more solar panels on the roofs of houses, for example.

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Finally I would just say I would like to wholeheartedly endorse what's been said by other people on the panel. It's really important that when you see politicians like me from the Liberal Democrats, but then politicians from other parties too, like the Conservatives, the Labour Party and the Green Party that you tell them what you think. When people tell their politicians what they think it really does make a difference and particularly the voices of young people, they can be extremely powerful.

If you see what was being said by Boris Johnson and whether you like him or not (and many other leaders at the COP 26 conference), they were saying that it's young people who were the main driver behind what they're doing. They do genuinely listen, so make sure you ask lots of questions. Tell them what you think and tell them - really importantly - to do more and do it quicker. The system can be really hard to negotiate. It's really difficult to get things done, but if more and more people tell us that we need to go faster and that we need to do more, that gives us a sure fire way of knowing that that's what we've got to do.”