

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

Oral evidence: [Building support for the energy transition](#), HC 734

Wednesday 3 September 2025

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Members present: Bill Esterson (Chair); Ms Polly Billington; Sir Christopher Chope; Torcuil Crichton; Luke Murphy; Melanie Onn; Mike Reader; Claire Young.

Questions 170 - 283

Witnesses

I: Angharad Hopkinson, Political Campaigner at Greenpeace UK; Professor Lorraine Whitmarsh, MBE, Director at Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations; and Stephanie Draper, Co-CEO and Director of Innovation and Practice, Involve.

II: Dr Roger Harrabin, Journalist and former BBC Energy and Environment Analyst; Bob Ward, Policy and Communications Director, The Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment; and Professor Rebecca Willis, Professor in Energy and Climate Governance, Lancaster University.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Greenpeace UK](#)
- [Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations](#)
- [Dr Roger Harrabin](#)
- [Lancaster University](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Angharad Hopkinson, Professor Whitmarsh and Stephanie Draper.

Q170 Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee in our first session of the new parliamentary session. This is part of our inquiry into building support for the energy transition, the third of our five Committee sessions in this inquiry.

We set four questions in our call for evidence: have the Government properly explained the potential benefits of the energy transition to the average citizen? Is there a clear understanding of the costs of the energy transition to householders and businesses? Is there a need for public campaigns to counter the anti-net zero narrative? How should the Government be more positively engaging the public with this goal?

We welcome our first panel. I will ask you to introduce yourselves and then we will go into some more detailed questions following on from those that we set. On this side, please introduce yourself.

Stephanie Draper: Hi, I am Stephanie Draper. I am the co-CEO of Involve. Involve is a public participation charity engaging the public and involving them in decisions that affect them. We have extensive experience in doing that on climate and net zero, including the Climate Assembly UK, running a citizen visioning process for UKRI's net zero programme, and the Energy Futures Citizen Panel. As such, we think that it is critical to engage people in conversations about net zero.

Angharad Hopkinson: Hi, I am Angharad Hopkinson, a Political Campaigner at Greenpeace UK. Greenpeace UK is part of a global network of organisations campaigning to protect the environment and fighting climate change for over 50 years. We have a long track record of developing practical policy advice and bolstering public support to push climate and nature protection up the agenda in politics, industry, and society.

Professor Whitmarsh: Hello, I am Lorraine Whitmarsh. I am a Professor of Environmental Psychology at the University of Bath, and Director of the UK Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations.

Q171 Chair: Thank you very much and you are all very welcome. We look forward to hearing your evidence this afternoon.

I will start with questions on trust and transparency in communications. To what extent do you think messaging about the benefits and costs of the energy transition has been unduly twisted for political purposes? Who would like to go first?

Angharad Hopkinson: Yes, I can kick off. As you all know, there is a huge amount of misunderstanding among the public about what the true costs of climate action are. Recent research has shown that people think that the cost of net zero will be 140 times more than the Climate Change



Committee actually predicts the cost to be, so there is obviously a huge amount of misunderstanding about the topic and the impact that it will have on households. That misunderstanding has left space in an information vacuum that has been filled by certain actors, bad actors from the media and politics, talking about “net stupid zero” and other things like that, trying to make it into a culture war. We think that there is a real space for DESNZ and the wider Government to start explaining the transition to people, the positive impacts of it and how it will impact them tangibly.

Q172 **Chair:** The question is: how can the Government counter such misinformation? Stephanie, perhaps pick that up in your first answer.

Stephanie Draper: Yes. While there is this environment, the overarching stats are that there is still a very high level of public support for net zero strategies, and quite often the specifics are really bought into. In the conversations that we have, people are concerned about climate, and they want to see Government leadership on that.

In terms of the how, we would say lean into that support, engage people. We know that engagement is a key route to building trust in institutions. The OECD says that the single biggest factor in building trust in institutions is whether people feel that they have a say in decision making. If you can have conversations with people about net zero and about shaping the policy, using deliberative mechanisms like citizens’ assemblies and other ways of engaging people, you increase trust.

We see that in our climate assemblies, the Westminster Climate Assembly. The level of trust in Westminster Council increased by 20% following the assembly. People were much more bought into the ideas. Research we did with Demos in our system white paper said that if people hear that a policy is shaped by someone like me it increases the trust level by 10%. So, from our perspective, asking people and getting them involved in the process is critical.

Q173 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I will move on to you, Lorraine. Can you pick up on the concerns that people increasingly have? The polling, yes, shows there is support for climate action, but increasingly people have reservations if they think that it is going to cost them more money, if it is going to be economically damaging. You can see already from the withdrawal from the net zero banking alliance of HSBC and Barclays that this is a perhaps a sentiment that is being expressed by financial institution. To what extent is this a result of Government messaging or action, or is there something else that is causing this concern about the potential for financial cost?

Professor Whitmarsh: I think that Government actions, as well as the Government’s explicit messaging, are playing into this. What is essentially sitting behind the withdrawal from net zero is the cost, as you say, as well as concerns about fairness. Those would be two of the big factors that the evidence suggests are sitting behind people’s reluctance



to engage with elements of net zero. However, if you look at the data in terms of uptake of heat pumps, that is growing. The adoption of the boiler upgrade scheme vouchers has been growing, and similarly for solar panel installations and energy efficiency installations, so there are positive trends. However, when you look into the polling as to what people feel about heat pumps in particular, yes, they are understandably concerned about the cost of those, the up-front cost of those.

Q174 **Chair:** Is that what you mean by fairness?

Professor Whitmarsh: Yes. Cost and freedom of choice is part of that. People are concerned that they may not have a choice when it comes to some of these things. I can give you a specific case study. Our centre has looked at what happened in Germany. It tried to roll out heat pumps very quickly, but it did it in a way that was conveyed as not having a choice—that this would be installed in your home without you having any say over it, and the cost was also quite prohibitive.

There was such a backlash by the media and by the public at large in Germany that the Government rolled back from what was actually a very ambitious target to roll out heat pumps. A failure to engage at the earlier stage and people's concerns about freedom to choose and being involved in the decision making, as we have heard, is behind that.

Q175 **Chair:** Yes. Do you think that has already happened here?

Professor Whitmarsh: Not to the same extent, because some of the targets are not quite as ambitious as Germany was originally proposing. People are broadly positive about heat pumps and renewable energy systems, but they are understandably concerned about the costs. Therefore, as well as talking about the benefits—going back to your point about what can the Government do in messaging—it is important to convey more strongly the benefits and to show that real people are benefiting from these.

Real people from lower income groups as well as other demographics are benefiting. Have those real stories. Use trusted messengers that are maybe local and more proximal to people and not just the Government saying these things. Demonstrate that these things are making a difference as well as making it easier and cheaper for people to install.

Chair: We will come back to the point about using local voices as message carriers. I will move on at this point to Mike Reader.

Q176 **Mike Reader:** Thank you, Chair. I will ask questions around civic forums and citizens' assemblies, and probably start with a very open question. Stephanie, I will come to you because I know Involve was responsible for facilitating the Climate Assembly UK. Do you think citizens' assemblies have a role to play in informing and changing public perception at macro level or are they more useful for tackling specific problems with a smaller group of people? Can they really move the needle on the public perception of net zero?



Stephanie Draper: They are really useful in terms of building trust. As part of the public participation strategy, we are advocating for a citizen panel that runs alongside the policy development and helps shape where you should engage, where you need to go into depth. That could be on the tricky challenges, or it could be in broadly designing policy. They work in both those ways.

You are bringing together a reflective sample of the UK population, as we did with Climate UK, or of a particular place. We do it locally as well as nationally. We have found those local processes to be incredibly useful in terms of informing policy and leading to behaviour change and people being more inspired to act.

Q177 **Mike Reader:** From your experience—particularly from the Climate Assembly UK—what are the design features that make assemblies effective, particularly when you are dealing with a highly sceptical audience?

Stephanie Draper: First is having a reflective sample so that you have different views in the room. You are not talking to the usual suspects. Secondly, that you share a breadth of information so that people are able to lean into the complexity of the issues. Thirdly as a space to deliberate and make recommendations and, finally, having somewhere for them to land. There is no point in doing these engagement processes if you are not prepared to respond to the recommendations and do something differently. That would undermine trust.

Q178 **Mike Reader:** Lorraine, do you think that this can be achieved at the scale we need to deal with the climate scepticism and the climate communications emergency or crisis that we now have in the UK? It feels like you can do it at a small level, but trying to change the view of the electorate would be nigh on impossible.

Professor Whitmarsh: It is the only tool in the toolkit. It does work particularly well, as we have heard, at a local level to dig into those specific issues, but potentially to be complemented by, say, online and digital engagement methods as well that can reach wider audiences. I think that it is about increasing the number and ways of engaging.

Q179 **Torcuil Crichton:** Stephanie, a couple of questions. How do you make citizens' assemblies representative? I am guessing that the people who engage with the climate debate are usually people, like you said, who have high support for renewables, "I am not against renewables, but—" and then you get the engaged people who are not against renewables but just do not want them on their doorstep.

Stephanie Draper: We use a process called sortition, which is like a citizen lottery. You send letters to a range of households and people apply to be involved. They are paid for their time, and you do get to people with a range of views.

Torcuil Crichton: These are retirees, I am guessing.



Stephanie Draper: No. They are reflective of the demographics. You are deliberately selecting the lottery to make sure that you have a range of ages, genders, ethnicities, and views on climate. We are always pleased to have a whole spectrum of views on climate, because it makes it more—

Q180 **Torcuil Crichton:** Are they assemblies or focus groups? What you are describing is the way you would select a focus group, almost.

Stephanie Draper: They go much deeper than that because they are providing information and you are getting into an issue. I was recently with a group in Gateshead where they got a deeper understanding of the district heat network, how it works, what the disruption would be and what the opportunities and barriers were, and explored that issue. Then you have time to deliberate. You are not just offering your opinion, you are sharing opinions with other people and deliberating so that you can come to a shared view.

What we see is that people are good at taking a societal view as well as reflecting their individual views in these forums. It is heartening to see. It is completely different to the polarisation that we see in the media. When you get people in a room together, they are able to work together and find solutions.

Q181 **Torcuil Crichton:** Interesting, because in polarised debates like referenda or Brexit, you found politics coming into it. Are people stuffing these citizens' assemblies with people who represent their point of view?

Stephanie Draper: That is also part of your demographic selection. That is a random selection, so it is more difficult to do.

Q182 **Chair:** This is interesting, but how many people are part of a citizen's assembly?

Stephanie Draper: Fifty to 100.

Q183 **Chair:** So in Gateshead you had 50 to 100 people. There are tens of thousands, if not 100,000-plus people living in Gateshead. How do you get the same engagement, the same understanding, the same analysis? Lorraine, you mentioned online, but even with that how do you reach other people with this level of analysis, or am I missing the point here?

Stephanie Draper: They are a reflective sample. You do have a mini public, and their views do reflect that community by design but, as Lorraine says, there are many ways. Quite often we will do much broader polling beforehand and bring that data into the assembly and let the people process that.

Q184 **Chair:** I understand that you are helping to understand the public's views. How do you turn that into disseminating information to make sure that people see the results of what you are doing and are engaged? This session is about how we communicate better to take people with the Government's agenda.



Stephanie Draper: My core message is that communication is a two-way process, so asking people what they want and starting with what they value is an effective way to design policy. If you have a reflective group doing that, people are more likely to trust people like them, and they will have conversations with their communities.

Professor Whitmarsh: Just to add, where there have been now quite a lot of citizens' assemblies on climate change, there are some striking similarities that come out of the recommendations from those processes, which suggest that they are tapping into some quite common needs, values, concerns that people have. There has been an analysis that has synthesised all of these different recommendations and there is a lot of commonality. I suppose that gives faith that, yes, this may not be a huge sample, but it is diverse enough that it is tapping into a larger set of ideas.

Angharad Hopkinson: Can I make another point about the macro impact of it? Citizens' assemblies do result in better policies if people feel the benefits of those policies, especially relating to environment and climate issues. That is another way that they benefit the communication of these issues. If we tackle things that are more important to people via these assemblies, it is a really good route to spreading it out among the wider population.

Q185 **Luke Murphy:** I was lucky enough to be one of the advisers on the climate assembly for Parliament and also ran about 10 juries when I worked outside Parliament. I fully agree that they are very positive in the sense of the engagement that they provide. I agree that you can find a representative group. My question always was, when translating it to actual policy making and making decisions, that they are representative largely when they go in—I agree that they are quite effective—but they are not representative when they come out. Because the vast majority of people are never going to go through six to 10 weeks of quite intensive discussion and evidence, and you are never going to get the entire population to that.

While I accept the point that you are making that people trust people like them, I am not saying that you are saying this, but I do want to clarify what role you think they should play in just giving decision making over to citizens' juries, which I do not support. What actual role do you think they should play? Is it just a feeding into the policy making process? Is it that that is the ultimate output of the of the policy? How should they play a role, because you cannot replicate it across the entire population?

Stephanie Draper: What we would envisage is that you have 100 people who are acting as a standing panel who can play the role of helping support policy making, being advisers a little bit like the CCC is in terms of delivering on government policy. Then you have localised conversations—juries, deliberations, assemblies, whatever form—that are looking at local strategies, particularly when there are things like major infrastructure.



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We have found that if you have early engagement on major infrastructure, you can reduce resistance and you can channel the infrastructure in a way that works for local communities. It is localised engagement supported by a structure that is looking at the central Government policy.

Q186 Mike Reader: We will talk a bit about climate action groups. Perhaps I will start with you, Angharad. Do you think that climate action groups are helping to build support for the energy transition or are they contributing to the increasing backlash towards net zero targets?

Angharad Hopkinson: You can imagine that my answer on this—as a representative of Greenpeace—is that we are building support among the population. We do that through a variety of ways. You will know that we have local groups that spread the messages in communities. We have a huge social media and online following and we have a really trusted position.

Activist organisations specifically like Greenpeace have an important role to play in expanding public understanding of climate issues. When Greenpeace and others take high-profile action over environmental issues it brings media and social media attention to issues, and it enables the depth of conversation that you do not normally get in these areas. It allows the public to consider environmental protection and the routes towards it in much greater depth.

Greenpeace and other organisations in this space are holding themselves to high standards in terms of the science and the facts behind it, so we have a huge amount of public trust in us. So I would say that there is a huge amount of value there and the Government should feel free to use us and other organisations more to reach out into groups.

Q187 Mike Reader: For those who are perhaps very famous now for taking direct action, sticking yourself to roads, throwing chalk over Stonehenge, do you think those people really galvanise support on climate change or do they just piss people off?

Angharad Hopkinson: I cannot comment on individual organisations or their theories of change behind it, but I know that Greenpeace's actions are always considered strategically and there is always thought that goes into who the target is and what message we are trying to get across to the audience that we are targeting.

Q188 Mike Reader: Rather than asking you to comment on the organisations, do you think that throwing chalk over Stonehenge or people gluing themselves the roads helps or hinders?

Angharad Hopkinson: I do not know that I can comment on that, either. I do not know the specificities of the impact that had ecologically in the location, but I think that often anything that gains attention can be helpful.



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Q189 **Mike Reader:** When you are planning more direct action as Greenpeace—let's take away from those more elitist, private-educated groups—how do you measure that you have actually moved the needle on public perception when you do your more direct activity?

Angharad Hopkinson: That is a really good question. Obviously, there are things that you can measure tangibly. After an action you can see how many people have been on to our website, read the information behind it, how many people have signed a petition, how many people have turned up to take part in a local activity. You can also track the media response to it as well and how that goes.

Q190 **Mike Reader:** My constituents, and I am sure everyone's constituents, go online, they put in their name and the postcode, their email, press the button and it sends me a template response. I then go to parliamentary research service. Chris perhaps goes to the Conservative research service and there may be a research service the Lib Dems use. We send them back a template answer. I never see it. One of my staff does it. Is that moving the needle or are you just wasting my time by sending me emails that I will never read?

Angharad Hopkinson: I do not know that the blame for that lies on the people emailing you so much as the process that does not allow MPs to meaningfully engage.

Q191 **Mike Reader:** Have you ever measured the carbon impact of all those emails that get sent every week, the template ones?

Angharad Hopkinson: I have never looked into it, but I can look into it and come back to you.

Q192 **Mike Reader:** Thank you. I do genuinely think that it is a complete waste of time, and it is a waste of public money, because we are all paying for staff to respond to template emails, but I will get off my high horse and move on.

Stephanie, is it possible to depolarise climate debates and foster dialogue between opposing groups?

Stephanie Draper: I would say yes. That is what we see in action. If everyone has the same level of information and has the time and the space that is created, which means that you are able to represent your views and share different perspectives and hear different lived experience, you get to a different place. We often see and hear that people have changed their mind about climate through these processes.

Q193 **Mike Reader:** Do you think these direct action groups will change their position? Do you think we would get Just Stop Oil or Insulate Britain to come to a conversation with climate sceptics, hear their views and change and come to a common understanding, or are they very much set in their ways—it is their way or no way? They know right, and we do not get any movement from anyone, and we just end up disagreeing and we



continue with this climate comms crisis that we have.

Stephanie Draper: The risk is that we pay a lot of attention to the people that are on each of the fringes, and actually most people sit in a more moderate space and are worried about the future, want the best for their place and they want to understand how a net zero strategy supports their place being better and life being more affordable.

Q194 **Mike Reader:** Lorraine, my final question, how do you think that the Government could constructively engage with these types of groups to help deliver their energy transition policies?

Professor Whitmarsh: The evidence suggests that once you have really made up your mind it is very difficult to change somebody's mind. When you have a very fixed, strong view—and your two examples were good illustrations of that—it is difficult to move those people away from that. But as we have heard, the majority of people have more malleable views and, as part of getting them to think about and deliberate over information and to talk to other people, those views can be shaped in the direction of more support for the clean energy transition, although there is broad support already, I would say.

Q195 **Mike Reader:** Angharad, can you give me an example of where Greenpeace has come with a policy position—you have listened to sceptics, and your position might have changed to accommodate bringing people on board.

Angharad Hopkinson: I would not say it is a case of bringing sceptics on board, but in the climate team at Greenpeace we are doing quite a lot of work with unions, making sure that legitimate concerns that people have, particularly in the north-east of Scotland around the oil and gas industry there, are listened to. As a result of that, we have been working with Friends of the Earth Scotland and Uplift, as well as Unite and other unions, to propose just transition policies that can support those communities.

We proposed before the last spending review a just transition fund that goes towards developing local community-owned wind manufacturing jobs, goes towards providing better ports for offshore wind, as well as going towards a training fund specifically for offshore oil and gas workers, to make sure that they are not left behind as part of this process.

Q196 **Mike Reader:** Did that dialogue move Greenpeace's corporate position on energy transfer in the north in Scotland?

Angharad Hopkinson: It made us be aware of making sure that the transition works for everyone and making sure that we are listening to impacted communities.

Q197 **Mike Reader:** Your position does not change even when you engage with others. You are not trying to find consensus.



Angharad Hopkinson: Yes, we are. We are trying to find consensus. We still want oil and gas in the North Sea to come to an end, but the basin is drying up anyway. There is only so long that these jobs are going to continue, so we want to make sure that while we are going through this transition process, that we think is necessary from all climate science perspectives, it is done so in a way that does not disproportionately impact the communities locally.

Q198 **Chair:** Two of you said that there is a large group of people who have less fixed views, to slightly paraphrase what you both said. If we go back to the Brexit referendum, that was very much true before the referendum itself was called, but by referendum day nearly everybody had a pretty fixed view one way or the other. Is there a danger of something similar happening?

Professor Whitmarsh: It would be interesting if we had a referendum on net zero to see if forcing people to vote in one way or another would help to firm up their views. What is quite striking, though, from all of the polling across the political spectrum, is that there is a surprising amount of agreement even among Reform voters, across the political spectrum, for what is sitting beneath net zero.

Net zero itself is certainly a polarising term, but even the majority of Reform voters support renewable energy. They even support renewable energy in their area, including grid upgrades. Certainly if you look at other issues—clean air and safe streets and recycling and so on—across the political spectrum there is strong agreement for that. Our polling shows that one of the most popular green policies is insulating homes, getting warmer insulated homes, with almost 80% of the public supporting that. That is across the political spectrum. We have more commonality than we have disagreement.

Q199 **Ms Polly Billington:** I cannot remember all the things that I wanted to ask in relation to this. Lorraine, it strikes me that what you are sort of saying, I think, is that this is not a comms problem, this is a policy design problem.

Professor Whitmarsh: Broadly, yes. I think that comms is part of it and some of that is explicit. We do need to have clearer, more positive, decisive messaging, but also we need that to be embodied in what politicians and leaders are doing as well, and also need signals in the policies that are implemented. Where we see maybe not the strongest support measures coming through for green actions that we want people to take, people infer that maybe this is not a priority for the Government and for the country, so there is also a communications element to that.

Fundamentally, people are quite pragmatic when they make these behavioural choices, like whether to install a heat pump or whether to buy an electric vehicle or whether to walk or cycle. They are weighing up cost and convenience, primarily. Those are the things that are foremost



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in their mind, and they are not really thinking ideologically about whether they want this.

Q200 Ms Polly Billington: That comes to my second question. Stephanie, in relation to your experience about citizens' juries—which I have contributed to by giving testament and so forth in the assembly that Luke oversaw before I came to this place. I know and understand the purpose and so forth of citizens' assemblies, but it does strike me that quite a lot of what we are talking about could be done by private companies in terms of market research to make sure that they are understanding their markets to be able to sell kit to people.

Why do we need to do it in this governmental way? Why do we need to do it in this civil society way? For example, what difference in the outcomes of your process would there be from somebody saying, "I need to understand what the market is for heat pumps and work out how to sell them to people"?

Stephanie Draper: The difference is that what we are talking about is trying to give people an input into decisions that affect them.

Q201 Ms Polly Billington: Forgive me, market research does that too. People get quite a lot out of market research, including language, policy, design and so forth. It is not just about your brand, is it?

Stephanie Draper: To be fair, we are working with SONI, the infrastructure energy provider in Northern Ireland, to engage its customers and residents on where it is building new infrastructure. There are companies that are doing this, and they see that as a valuable way of designing infrastructure with the community at their heart. Then the engagement on things like personal household choices can happen in many different places.

Q202 Ms Polly Billington: Do you think that campaign groups—climate action campaign groups such as Greenpeace and indeed some of the stuff that I have been involved in, again before I came to this place—are well placed to engage with people to design things that will work for the outcomes of the people, bearing in mind that climate campaign groups have a particular set of priorities that may be very, very, very different from what you call the persuadable middle, and I would call the moderate middle?

Angharad Hopkinson: It is not something that Greenpeace currently does, run citizens' assemblies.

Q203 Ms Polly Billington: No, no, I mean when we were talking about the north-east of Scotland. Why does Greenpeace think that it is in a good place to talk to oil and gas workers about what is right for them and what is best for them?

Angharad Hopkinson: We do not do it face to face. We go through—

Ms Polly Billington: Heaven forefend you should meet them.



Angharad Hopkinson: No, that is not my point. It was more that we work with experts in the area—you have Unite, RMT, the unions who work on it—to use them as trusted people in that area, because we know that Greenpeace can be seen as not a very trusted ally in those groups, so it is a case of building trust by working in partnership with others.

Q204 **Ms Polly Billington:** Why don't you leave them alone and leave it to people who do know those organisations, those communities, those institutions, and those workers better than you?

Angharad Hopkinson: Because otherwise we would still be working in these areas, but without any input.

Q205 **Ms Polly Billington:** Because those other organisations would not care enough about climate to do it?

Angharad Hopkinson: No, they would. It is a case of combining knowledge and expertise in a way that you get greater than the sum of your parts. As climate experts we can work with union experts and come together to create something that works for both.

Q206 **Claire Young:** I would like to start with Lorraine, please. What role, if any, do you see for behavioural science and social transformation models in guiding government efforts to counter public scepticism around net zero? How does that differ in rural areas where there may be additional structural barriers to action?

Professor Whitmarsh: There is a huge amount of evidence from behavioural science that can be brought to bear to understand the drivers and barriers to the public engaging in a clean energy transition. Some of the top insights from that say that information by itself is very limited in what it can do to change behaviour.

A recent meta-analysis found that information is only 2% to 3% effective in achieving behaviour change, but what it can do is to raise awareness among people about why we need more structural measures and policies, like incentives, subsidies, regulations and infrastructure investments and so on, building public support for those so-called upstream measures that remove the barriers to behaviour change that basically make it cheaper and easier for people to do the right thing. Those are the things that fundamentally are the most effective to achieve behaviour change. Those are the key insights in terms of what behavioural science can do.

When it comes to scepticism, what we have seen is a shift away from climate denial, per se—denying that there is anthropogenic climate change—more to discourses of delay and rhetoric around it is too expensive, this is not the right time, or other people should sort this out. What social science can do is to look at why people might be mobilising those discourses. Again it quite often comes down to the concerns about cost and fairness sitting behind that, and then it is feeding those concerns into the design of policies to ensure that they do reduce costs and make it easier and fairer for people to change their behaviour.



Q207 **Claire Young:** In the rural areas in particular?

Professor Whitmarsh: I do not think the fundamental principles of behavioural science or social science would say that there is a different approach needed. Depending on which specific behaviours you are talking about, there might be unique challenges for, say, off-grid communities, that they might need particular policy measures to support their behaviour change. What we have already talked about, in terms of using local approaches and trusted messengers and working at the community level, speaks to the fact that that would apply just as well in those rural communities as urban ones.

Q208 **Claire Young:** Stephanie, what behavioural interventions have proven most effective in shifting public attitudes towards low-carbon technologies, and how can those be scaled nationally?

Stephanie Draper: I can only speak from our experience, and we are explicitly not about changing people's behaviour. We are about asking people what they want from their place. We have learnt that people do not like to be told what to do, they like to explore and ask. We get pushback in our processes if people feel like the imperative for action on climate is being handed to them. They want the Government to lead and then they will play their part.

What we see from Climate Assembly UK is we went back to participants two years later and the vast majority of them had still changed at least one behaviour and over half of them had changed 10 things in their lives, ranging from the things that you would expect to see. There is an inadvertent behaviour change result from having explored these issues in more depth.

Q209 **Claire Young:** Angharad, how can the Government ensure that behavioural interventions, nudges, social modelling do not mask structural inequality such as fuel poverty or cultural under-representation?

Angharad Hopkinson: That is a really, really good question. Both of the other panellists have spoken about the importance of people feeling like it is a fair transition and that everything they are being asked to do is fair. A point that I wanted to make was the importance of making sure that it is not just the lower rung of socioeconomic people who are dealing the most with these impacts.

At Greenpeace we want to see wealth taxes introduced, taxes on oil and gas producers, making sure that polluters pay, so that this can go towards funding things like social energy tariffs, the bus scheme, the warm homes plan, all of that, to make it easier for people who are seeing the impacts.

Q210 **Claire Young:** You seem to be focusing on the structural inequalities. When we talk about nudge factors, for example, if you make things easier for people to do that makes them more likely to do them, so there are



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small things that you could do. Does that change in situations where someone is facing fuel poverty or cultural misrepresentation, or are there things that are applicable across?

Angharad Hopkinson: Yes, there are definitely things that need to be targeted to specific groups with specific barriers, but there are obviously also things that make it easier for everyone. I recommend that DESNZ undertakes a research project to understand what these barriers are for different groups and find out what the solutions to those specific barriers are. We know that many people will see that the cost implications of a heat pump are something inherently problematic. They cannot even afford one, but making it easier for them to understand how those costs can be paid, but delivering things that make it cheaper and easier—

Claire Young: Lorraine, did you want to come in?

Professor Whitmarsh: Just to say that as part of the House of Lords inquiry on behaviour change for climate environmental goals, which concluded about two years ago, what was very clear then was that there is a general Government preference for so-called downstream interventions, information provision, leaving it up to individuals to choose whether or not to make green choices.

What that does is precisely not address structural inequalities because it does not remove the barriers to behaviour change, whereas more upstream measures—regulations, economic incentives, disincentives, and so on—those sorts of things are more likely to remove those barriers and make it easier for everybody to change their behaviours. So, yes, absolutely, the more you move upstream and do not rely only on, say, information provision, the more you get to those structural issues.

Q211 **Chair:** Are the Government's targets and the ambition for Clean Power 2030 and the implications of it realistic given what you have all been saying about behaviour and attitudes?

Professor Whitmarsh: In terms of adoption of green technologies, like heat pumps and EVs, we are not where we need to be for those targets and there absolutely needs to be an upscaling and more support available for people to make those choices.

Q212 **Chair:** That is policy rather than communication, going back to Polly's question.

Professor Whitmarsh: Yes, communication is only a small part of what we need. I think that the Government's forthcoming public participation strategy is important. It will engage people in and raise awareness of the need for transformation, but it will not by itself necessarily remove those barriers, so we do need those other measures.

Q213 **Melanie Onn:** In terms of people's sympathies or their positive attitude towards clean energies, net zero policies and opportunities, is that impacted in an environment at the moment where we are seeing job



losses as a backdrop in energy, with a bit of a delay in clean technologies? Technologies—like carbon capture and storage—are not going to be up and running for some time. How do we have that conversation and keep people on board through what is a bit of a turbulent time at the moment?

Professor Whitmarsh: I can start. It is about finding policies that actually reduce bills. Our polling shows that there is such strong support for things like insulation and energy efficiency measures that would help with the cost of living crisis and provide tangible benefits to people in the here and now. Other policies that are widely supported are things like school streets where it is tackling congestion, air pollution, child safety, and we see very strong levels of support for that.

It is thinking about where policies can address the needs that people have, which might be financial needs in the here and now and reducing bills for people. We see stronger support for those across the spectrum.

Stephanie Draper: The common themes that come out of the conversations that we have are about affordability and information. There is often an ask for a one-stop shop that talks about how you make those bills affordable, what sort of insulation works for your particular type of home, the nuance, and the detail, but also how to find trusted traders who are trusted intermediaries.

Often people do not know who to trust. This feels like a very uncertain landscape in terms of the new technologies. The other things that come through are things like affordability of public transport, regulation on new builds. That seems like a very accessible and easy thing for people to do.

Q214 **Melanie Onn:** Making things easier and accessible across the piece is a way of trying to keep the support there. Thank you.

Angharad Hopkinson: I want to add that we have seen increasing examples of the high energy use industries being impacted by high energy costs. There is work to be done from the Department, and the Government more broadly, on their crisis comms in this area—it is being weaponised by bad actors on the right to blame net zero for these issues—making it clear that high energy costs are not down to net zero, that our energy costs are so high because of the high wholesale price of gas.

This is a little plug for a report that we are launching tomorrow. Making that point and making it clearly so that it is not allowed to be weaponised. There is also the comms piece that can be made that Ed Miliband does keep talking about, which is that there is a huge amount of growth in the green jobs sector. At the moment for every one job in the UK's oil and gas sector, there are three in green jobs more broadly within renewables.

Claire Young: I should just say, Chair, that I am hosting that report launch tomorrow, just for clarity.



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Chair: It is in my diary as well. There we go. Thank you much. We will move on.

Q215 **Luke Murphy:** I just wanted to correct that I definitely did not oversee the climate assembly—sorry if I gave that impression. It was definitely a very minor advisory role.

You have all been clear and all the polling shows that there has been an increase in climate polarisation but broad support for climate action remains. Why do you think that so few members of the public think that there is not a positive story to tell about the impact of Britain's climate policies to date?

I was struck by More in Common research recently. It showed that in every segment except one the majority of people believed that Britain's climate policy so far had made no meaningful difference to reducing emissions, had not made the country or their local area better off and had not been fair to people like them. Yet they still support it. It is almost amazing, given what is going on there.

Professor Whitmarsh: I can start. Historically there has been an assumption that going green is about sacrifice, and that if you want to protect the environment you have to give up something or we have to put in a lot of effort. That is not entirely unrealistic. Often it can cost you more to make the green choice—electric vehicles do cost more—or there can be inconvenience involved, so it is not an unrealistic assumption. Certainly, the upfront costs of heat pumps and electric vehicles are high, so they are a genuine impediment right now to people, so some of those concerns are realistic.

Clearly there is a comms piece that is useful, to say that there are people who are making these changes and who are benefiting from them. Those stories are not being told to the extent that they could be. There are organisations like the Local Storytelling Exchange, which joins up local journalists, encourages them, and helps them to find genuine stories about people taking climate action, showing those real people, what they are doing and how they are benefiting, and sharing those stories. There are examples of that happening.

Nesta has its visitor heat pump scheme where you can go and see what a heat pump looks like and speak to people who have bought it and how they have benefited. There are initiatives that are happening to try to share those positive stories but there is more that we can do to upscale that and counter the historical "going green is difficult" narrative.

Q216 **Luke Murphy:** Does it not suggest that in part up until now—I am not saying it is not an issue; it clearly is—the driving factor of support for climate change is not about the immediate benefits that it is going to provide around cost of living on your bills? The driving factor—I know that you talked about sacrifice—is about doing the work for future generations, protecting our environment, maybe increasing the energy



security, the more emotional arguments that tap into people's sense of wanting to protect the country and the future generations.

Professor Whitmarsh: It is helpful to make those arguments, and we know that those are the sorts of values that are widely shared, so again that goes back to the depoliticisation. The more we highlight the benefit to the community and future generations of these changes, the more we can create a sense of shared trajectory and collective effort that people can buy into. But we also absolutely need to bring it back to there being tangible benefits to them and to help them realise those benefits by reducing the barriers and costs as well.

Q217 **Luke Murphy:** I should add that the More in Common research also finds that people do think that renewables will bring their bills down, even if they do not think it has so far, which is interesting. Britain we made and others have found that there is beginning to be a bit of an uptick in local opposition to renewable energy projects and concerns about that.

There is a lot of debate about the rollout of the energy infrastructure that will be needed to meet the clean energy target. What are the strategies that are needed to overcome that potential increase in local opposition to energy projects, which might be needed nationally but will affect people very viscerally on a local level?

Stephanie Draper: I would say that that is about early local engagement, as we saw with the infrastructure project in Northern Ireland, but also starting in a different place. With the work in Gateshead we were looking at what they wanted from the future of their energy system. People were aware that there needed to be a transition, but they were unaware of all of the work that Gateshead had already done on district heat networks and got into that.

We started with, "What do you love about your place? What do you want to change, what do you want to improve and how can this agenda help support that?" You are not starting with, "What can you do about net zero" and that slightly risky punitive angle of that, but you are starting with, "How does this add value to how you want to live and to thriving places?"

Angharad Hopkinson: I would also like to add the point that we are very supportive of community energy projects as a route to getting people on board for local energy infrastructure in their areas, making sure that communities can see the economic benefit from building these pieces of infrastructure. It also adds to consent for future projects, making sure that they work with their communities to ensure that there is local ownership, not just benefit payments but fully embedded ownership, and making sure that there are additional incentives for local communities, for example access to the grid. You can offer incentives in terms of home insulation and other things like that that just make it a bit of a sweeter pill for local people.



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Professor Whitmarsh: I do not have much to add except that the Government Office of Science has an excellent briefing paper on public engagement on grid infrastructure, which talks about a lot of these exact things and how to balance the fast versus fair elements, that it is in the longer run more sensible to spend some time engaging communities. Even though it might slow down the process, it means that you are more likely to get the buy in from those communities and to improve the quality of decision-making.

Q218 **Luke Murphy:** Is the Clean Energy 2030 target a problem in that regard? Should it be slowed down in order to ensure that proper consultation?

Professor Whitmarsh: Not necessarily. It is about not assuming that the quickest way to get things done is to skip the engagement. That could be counterproductive.

Stephanie Draper: It is more about doing the up-front work in order that you do not have to defend the decision at the end. If you involve people in the decision up front, you are more likely to have people bought in, therefore you will not have to spend all of that time reworking decisions, which is much more cost-effective, too.

Q219 **Chair:** Angharad, Greenpeace has said that 45 renewable projects have been rejected in 2025 alone. We talked a bit about this. Should it be developers, should it be the Government, should it be both? What is the direct communication that is needed? I take your point about community projects, but for large-scale projects that will not be enough. What does that communication and engagement look like?

Angharad Hopkinson: Do you mean on getting them consented?

Chair: Yes.

Angharad Hopkinson: There is work to do to explain the benefits. Something that I think most people do not understand is the bills benefits that come from building these renewables. They are cheaper than gas-fired power stations, and people do not really know that. I think that people think that it is too good to be true, that is something that is good for the planet can be good for their bills as well, so there is work to be done there.

Q220 **Chair:** What does that? How do you engage with people? You can have 100 people in a village hall, but that is still only a drop in the ocean compared to the wider population. How do you reach people to get this message across? We keep coming back to this question.

Angharad Hopkinson: It is a localised approach that works best for this. I would recommend advice going to individual councils that have contentious planning applications in process, making sure that local people have talking points, that they can make the right arguments to the people in the room. I think that there is space for a larger-scale



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public comms piece of work from DESNZ, making sure that everyone really knows what is going on and how important these large-scale projects are to meet our 2030 targets and our legally binding climate targets.

Q221 **Chair:** Most of the Committee want to come in on the back of this question, but, Stephanie, you look like you have something around that, so please go for it.

Stephanie Draper: There was a study done in Scotland on renewable projects and they looked at a range of windfarm developments in Scotland—it is Roberts & Escobar; I can send you the reference—and they recommended many public deliberations on early spatial planning, local area plans, then reviewing specific proposals and also having some space for national debate about what the overarching regulation would be. The core message is community-level conversations that are meaningful, and changes can be made as part of those conversations, involving all of the relevant actors, the infrastructure providers, and others.

Chair: Thank you. I am going to Mike Reader next, then to Torcuil Crichton and then to Polly Billington.

Q222 **Mike Reader:** This is probably a question for Lorraine, because it is very easy when there is a local scheme for people to find a snappy reason to object rather than a snappy reason to support. Why do you think that is?

Professor Whitmarsh: Psychologically, people gravitate more towards negative information than positive. That is the case. It is also clear that when people have stronger views they are more likely to be expressing those to developers or whoever is running the consultation, so you will get more extreme views and often the more negative ones in particular will be expressed. You might hear more of those, and sitting beneath that are people who are more ambivalent.

Chair: Torcuil Crichton, we have moved into your questions on community engagement.

Torcuil Crichton: Polly has a follow-up question, so does Polly want to go first.

Q223 **Ms Polly Billington:** Stephanie, what evidence do you have that the early engagement processes that you are talking about have averted the judicial reviews and slowing down of the planning processes that are the biggest anxieties that the Government had about introducing particularly the large-scale infrastructure?

Stephanie Draper: It is interesting that you should say that, because we are working on a project at the moment that is looking at what is the cost of engaging versus the cost of defending decisions, and that process, so that is a bit of a work in progress.



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Q224 **Ms Polly Billington:** We do not have that evidence at the moment?

Stephanie Draper: No. We have pieces of research that tell us that this is a good way to go, and there are case studies and examples of where things have been more successful.

Q225 **Chair:** Give us a case study of where it has worked. That would be a good place to start.

Stephanie Draper: I would come back to the Northern Ireland example where SONI engaged early, and it was able to design a scheme that had much greater local support.

Q226 **Ms Polly Billington:** I am struck by the fact that there are a significant number of obligations on large developers, and indeed a big organisation like National Grid, in order to be able to do this, yet they still end up with this opposition, people raising money for JRs and so forth. So, even with the obligations that are currently in place, it does not stop the slowdown, and I would be interested to understand how much of this you think is actually about engagement and how much of it might be other drivers that are causing the issue.

Stephanie Draper: It is difficult to say, but a lot of the time what we are not seeing is real, meaningful engagement where people are prepared to do things differently as a result of having those conversations. That is the key, that it is a genuine listening project and that you are prepared to make changes, adjustments, and work together to make it work for the community, and designed with a community-first approach, which is not necessarily what is happening.

Q227 **Ms Polly Billington:** If it is a small project that might be possible. If it is a large, nationally significant infrastructure project, that is significantly more challenging, isn't it?

Stephanie Draper: It is.

Q228 **Ms Polly Billington:** Angharad, as a Greenpeace campaigner, how do you feel about compiling your talking points in order to be able to support large international companies that are developing large energy projects in communities?

Angharad Hopkinson: There is a slight tension.

Ms Polly Billington: Slight?

Angharad Hopkinson: Some of these big energy companies have investments in renewables and oil and gas, but the scale of the issue means that we need things to be built as soon as we can, and if they are in the best place to provide it—

Ms Polly Billington: Regardless of who it is done by or regardless of the profit and where the money goes?



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Angharad Hopkinson: We definitely hope that it would remain in renewables, but the scale of the challenge is that we need them as soon as possible.

Q229 **Torcuil Crichton:** Thanks all for coming in. Time is short so I will keep my questions brief on community engagement and overcoming that opposition. As Polly alluded to, the opposition to renewables is a lightning rod for another kind of political position to the Government. You get these three themes of people being completely sceptical about the reasons for doing this, then they feel it is being done to them, and then they feel they are not being listened to when they are consulted.

When it comes to trying to build community support, Angharad, do you feel that this consumer offer off your bill, £5,000 per megawatt compensation to communities affected, is enough? I go to meetings where people think that is a cheap buy-off, and I go to meetings where people scoff at the idea of the planet heating up. How do you reach these people?

Angharad Hopkinson: I understand what you are saying that it feels like a buy-off if it is done as a one-time thing because it buys into that “done to them” issue that you highlighted. That is the importance of embedding making people’s lives better into every single one of these policies. It cannot just be a tick box every now and then. It needs to be embedded across everything that DESNZ and all other departments do. It is not about paying people off if they have a pylon nearby; it is also about making sure that there is easy, cheap, accessible public transport and all of that other stuff.

Q230 **Torcuil Crichton:** How about starting with giving them a share of the development?

Angharad Hopkinson: Yes, community energy, having a share of those profits, is definitely a good way forward as well.

Q231 **Torcuil Crichton:** Lorraine, you alluded to that balance between fast and fair. What we see is the UK Government and the Scottish Government—and a lot of these renewables will be built in Scotland—coming together to agree a shorter planning process, a shorter time to appeal against these things; basically speeding things up. Do you think that gives people a feeling that they are being cut out of the process?

Professor Whitmarsh: As long as part of that process allows a genuine space for people to express their views, I think that is great. There is bureaucracy that could be certainly cut and make that planning process easier. If you can achieve both—to make the decision quicker and more efficient but also not remove the role for engagement—that is the ideal.

Q232 **Torcuil Crichton:** The other side of this—as you discussed, Stephanie—is getting bogged down in legalese and things not getting done, and the temperature is increasing every summer while we do nothing. People that can afford it do it, but most people feel not listened to when government



or councils or planning processes go through.

Stephanie Draper: We have these social technologies, these democratic innovations, which enable us to have these conversations well and ask people in communities relatively quickly what would it take for them to come along with this plan, and perhaps ask them do they want community energy ownership or do they want something off their bills, or do they want something else, so these things have to be designed community by community.

Q233 **Torcuil Crichton:** That comes back to the original engagement you and I had, that the people who tend to engage in that are the kind of people who are for renewables but—

Stephanie Draper: Not if you have selected your—

Torcuil Crichton: Or people who will use it have another political agenda, a party political agenda perhaps, who will use renewables as a lightning rod to build opposition against the current Government.

Stephanie Draper: I would say again that the beauty of our processes is that you are getting a reflective or representative sample and that you get to that range of views, therefore you have a different form of conversation.

Q234 **Chair:** The Government say that people who are hosting major infrastructure should benefit financially. Should that be through direct payments, money off bills; or should it be community assets that are funded, or both? Do either of those work?

Stephanie Draper: That is not my area of expertise. My suggestion is that maybe you have an option list, and you can ask communities what they would like and have them decide what it would take for them to come along.

Chair: Did you say you should ask your meetings?

Stephanie Draper: You should ask the community, if they have infrastructure built in their place, what would it take for them to come along; what would make them feel better about it.

Angharad Hopkinson: Yes, I agree. Leave it up to the community in question with a suite of options and see what their preference is.

Chair: There is the question again of how we ask and how we find out what everybody wants. Melanie?

Melanie Onn: A comment on that. It feels like design by committee, and that lacks leadership. You could end up in a smorgasbord of indecision as everybody equally plumps for different options and it becomes stalling rather than enabling, empowering, and moving things on at speed.

Q235 **Chair:** To turn that into a question, do you agree with what Melanie has



said? How do you overcome that problem?

Stephanie Draper: We started this conversation talking about trust and trust goes both ways. What we find is when we have conversations we bring groups of the public together, and if you give them clear parameters and boundaries they can come to decisions together quite quickly. It does not necessarily need to be an extended process of stalling, which you will probably get if you impose something on a community anyway. We would say it is a better way forward.

Melanie Onn: We are talking about a positive there, aren't we, Chair? We are imposing positive benefits, not negative.

Chair: Indeed. We will move on to Polly Billington. I think you have the last set of questions.

Q236 **Ms Polly Billington:** I totally understand about sortition, and I understand about representation and all of that kind of thing. I also know that in some of those circumstances it is particularly challenging to make sure that the most disadvantaged and the most excluded get the same level of confidence; they do not have the same level of capability to be able to make sure that they are part of that conversation. I am sure you have techniques for how you deal with that within the methodology that you have. Are there specific methods of public engagement that reach those most disadvantaged groups who are frankly at the moment profoundly at risk of no policies being designed for them or by them. What do we do about that?

Stephanie Draper: There are specific techniques; it is a range of different things that we do. For example, in Scotland we had an expert by experience panel help design the minimum income guarantee and how that would be designed, so people with experience of financial vulnerability. You can look at designing with particular groups in mind. Also working with community groups, faith groups, the voluntary sector and encouraging people to be part of those specific processes or others is a key part of our strategy, ensuring that we get to the people who are less often heard.

Q237 **Ms Polly Billington:** Where do you see the Government in terms of their attitude towards adopting those kind of tactics? As we have agreed that this is fundamentally a policy problem rather than a comms problem, are the Government open to using those strategies to design policies that might help the most vulnerable and most excluded?

Professor Whitmarsh: My understanding is they are on a journey. There has been an increase in the use of deliberative democracy methods within the Government and within national and local government more generally. That is starting to happen, but more can be done to particularly reach out to those more disadvantaged groups. So, yes, we are on a journey.

Q238 **Ms Polly Billington:** This is all very interesting, but it goes back to



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Melanie's point about lack of leadership and slowing things down. We have accountable democratic institutions at local level: they are called councils. What role do you see for councils and what problems are they currently experiencing in being able to make sure that they are designing and delivering a place-based climate programme that meets the needs of their communities?

Professor Whitmarsh: We have talked about trust, and they are more trusted than, say, national Government. The more local you get you have that trust and you can also understand the needs of the community much better and then co-create a place-based approach that meets those needs.

I think local authorities are critical; that is also something that was a key insight from the House of Lords inquiry that I mentioned, but they are vastly under-resourced, and the people that gave evidence on behalf of the local authorities in that inquiry made that very clear. They are very passionate about supporting their community, they are very passionate about deliberative democracy, innovations and so on. However, to roll those out properly and to involve people more, they need more resource.

Q239 **Ms Polly Billington:** Simply to do the processes that they are already legally able to do like, for example, process planning applications?

Professor Whitmarsh: Yes, but also the skills to be able to do those justice.

Q240 **Chair:** The final question from me. In the last hour and 10 minutes or so we have barely mentioned the climate crisis. Is that part of the problem, that in all of the communication we have stopped talking about how serious things are, and that the latest evidence shows once again how important it is that we change direction immediately? Do we need to revisit the analysis and the communication in order to give people the reason for doing things quickly and for engaging and supporting this agenda?

Professor Whitmarsh: I would say yes.

Chair: How do we do it?

Professor Whitmarsh: There is a huge amount of evidence on how to communicate climate change—our centre does a lot of work in this space—and it is about getting the balance right between talking about how serious the risks are and how we need to accelerate action and the costs of inaction, as well as talking about the benefits and the positive reasons why we might want to engage, "Here is how you do it", and talking about the practicalities.

We do need to say more, and the Government can step into this space to talk about the severity of the risks that we are facing. Climate change is one, energy security; these things are also interconnected. We can talk about all of the reasons why we need to transform energy systems and



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the urgency of doing that, but also at the same time talk about, "In the here and now, here is how you will benefit" as well.

Angharad Hopkinson: I definitely agree. I think the public knowledge and caring about climate change is kind of being taken for granted a little bit at the moment. There is a role to play for the Government in linking the hottest summer ever that we have just experienced to climate crisis, in explaining to people that there are policies that can make a difference, and work towards that.

Stephanie Draper: I think it is about sustained leadership on this and coming out and showing that this is an important policy and it will be transformational but also thinking about how we do that comms. Lorraine has talked about this a bit, but the Climate Outreach communications research talks about making it real and tangible to people's lives. Emotions over statistics, human stories, authentic messages; we have talked a bit about those things. It will not work putting information on heat pipes on a Government website; that is not the level of communication that we need. It is different.

Chair: Thank you to our first panel for your evidence this afternoon, it is very much appreciated. We will break very briefly while we change over panels. This is the end of the first session.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Roger Harrabin, Bob Ward and Professor Rebecca Willis.

Q241 **Chair:** Welcome back to the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee and our second panel this afternoon. I will ask you to introduce yourselves.

Dr Harrabin: I am Roger Harrabin. I have spent getting on for 40 years at the BBC, 35 of them I think it is fair to say in pioneering energy and climate in the broadcast media. At that time, few other people were interested in it, and an attempt was made by some of my colleagues to stop me reporting on the environment because they said it was not a story. Anyway, things have changed a bit since then. I sent 20 or so ideas to the Committee in a kind of random splash that might prove helpful.

I am also happy to discuss in outline terms the other embargoed note I sent you about research tracking trends in net zero reporting in broadcast, which I think is quite telling. I would happily talk a bit about that, although it is under embargo, so I have to be a bit careful. While you were out, Chair, Melaine asked, "Is net zero the kiss of death?" and I want to talk about that because I think it is deeply problematic and has been snatched off the Government and progressives, and they are now beating us on the head with it. I want to focus on that.

Chair: We look forward to you having much more to say, thank you.



Bob Ward: I am Bob Ward. I am the Policy and Communications Director at the Grantham Research on Climate Change and Environment, which is a research centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science. I am also Chair of the London Climate Ready Partnership, which brings together organisations, companies, communities, and local government in London who are concerned with resilience in the capital.

Professor Willis: I am Rebecca Willis. I am a Professor in Energy and Climate Governance at Lancaster University. I lead the Climate Citizens Research Group. We have a portfolio of projects where we look at how people are and could be engaged in energy and climate policy, and also the policymaking process. I am also an expert advisor to the Climate Change Committee but if I do speak from the point of view of the Climate Change Committee I will be very clear on doing that, rather than my research.

Q242 **Chair:** Thank you very much. You are all very welcome and we look forward to your evidence in the next hour or so. Before I hand over to Luke Murphy I will repeat a version of the question I asked the last panel at the end. The Government focus on the benefits of giving us energy security, lower bills, creating lots of jobs through the energy transition. They talk less about the existential threat of climate change and global warming that underpins this. Do we need to have a rethink and a reset in the way that we use climate science in underpinning the analysis and the arguments?

Dr Harrabin: Part of the problem in this whole debate is that the level of complexity is horrendous. Deciding how to weave climate change coverage substantially into energy transition I think might prove difficult, but I totally agree with you that we should consistently be coming back to why we are here.

I am an individual, I have come here as an individual, I am a parent and a grandparent. I am frankly terrified of what the world holds in store. It seems unbelievable that when we have reached this stage—and 35 years ago I was reporting there was this thing, it might be real, it might not be real, not sure whether it will be serious or not—here we have the world on fire, basically, and we do not manage to mention it.

I am extremely frustrated that you can hear several stories on net zero being challenged. Do the economics work or not; it is fair enough there is debate about that, but the bottom line is we are doing it because we feel like we need to do something to save the planet for our children and our grandchildren. That should be foremost in the coverage.

If you take a look at the embargoed thing I sent you—and I have to say I have not checked this with the BBC, so I do not guarantee it is true, but the researchers seem valid—during last year's Valencia floods, on News at Ten four out of 15 programmes connected the story to climate change. That is absolutely extraordinary. There are all sorts of reasons why this



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happens and why it happens this way, structural problems, which I am happy to talk about.

Professor Willis: I agree with Roger that we need to be talking about the urgency of this, but actually most people agree with that as well. I do citizens' panels where we sit down with representative groups of people. We start off with a conversation about climate science and the risks and climate impacts, and they are there, so it is not necessarily front of mind for people every day, but they come to those sessions with high levels of concern, and their number one question is, "Where are the Government in this?"

It is telling—and there is very solid evidence on this—that decision makers, including MPs, consistently underestimate public concern about climate change and support for action. We did detailed interviews with MPs—the peer-reviewed paper is actually published today—which showed that they are very worried about championing ambitious policies because they do not believe there is public support. The evidence does not support that.

If you look at it in quantitative terms as well, polling by Climate Barometer shows that if you ask MPs whether they think that local people support wind farms or oppose them, they get it wrong. They halve the level of support, and they double the level of opposition compared to when you ask exactly the same question to people. There is this perception gap, and it is problematic now in policy.

Q243 **Chair:** Before I come to you, Bob, in More in Common's polling of people on why they voted in the last general election, what issues had the biggest impact, only 13% said that it was climate change and the environment. Why is that figure so low, given you are seeing what seems to be a much higher level of importance?

Professor Willis: People are concerned about the climate crisis but that does not mean it is front of mind all the time. Front of mind for people obviously changes depending on the circumstances but it is cost of living, it is their local area. We know what people are most exercised about at the moment, but the climate crisis acts as a kind of ticking reality in the back of their minds, particularly amongst young people, I should say.

I very quickly want to come back to the idea that was discussed in the earlier session around the silent or persuadable majority. This is not a normal distribution. You have people who are very concerned about climate, represented by Greenpeace who were here earlier; you also have people who do not believe it and will not have their minds changed.

In terms of that group in the middle, they skew massively toward concern. It is not a bell curve, it is actually skewing toward concern, but it is not front of mind for them. They want leadership and they want that leadership from Government. Something very common that we hear—and we were talking about Climate Assembly UK—when people are selected to



be part of these deliberative processes they ask, "Why did you ask me? I don't have any particularly strong views on climate. I am worried about it but what expertise do I have?" The idea that their views matter is a surprise to them.

Q244 **Chair:** Is it your view that the Government and other organisations and bodies should be making climate and the environment a more important issue for people?

Professor Willis: We see it as a sort of virtuous circle, or we like to call it building a mandate. This works in a positive way. Where people say they are worried about climate, the Government's response is to say, "We hear you. We understand your concern. As a society, we want to make the changes that we need to make and we want to make those changes in ways that work for you, meet your own priorities and suit your lives". The more you do of that the more you get this sort of virtuous circle whereby it is seen as a collective challenge.

Of course you can undermine it, and if those messages and that leadership is not present then what we have found through our research is that people retreat into cynicism and isolation, and that is a real concern at the moment.

Chair: Thank you. Bob?

Bob Ward: As a number of people have mentioned, there is overwhelming public support to tackle climate change, and increasingly people are joining the dots for themselves. We have been through the warmest summer on record, we have had nearly 1,000 wildfires during the summer across the country, and we have had probably 3,000 to 4,000 killed by the heat. It is a natural disaster that nobody is talking about. The figures will come out in November. There was not a single Government Minister who talked about this when it was announced on Monday, none of the newspapers reported it, and you wonder why people are not making the connection.

The opponents of action on climate change, which unfortunately currently include the official Opposition, are engaged in a misinformation campaign to persuade the public that the net zero target—which is a legal target that was voted in with overwhelming political support—is somehow an arbitrary, bureaucratic target. It is not. It is a target based on clear scientific evidence, probably the most scientifically based Government policy target that there is.

At the moment there is a massive misinformation campaign, which includes large parts of the media but also MPs, I am afraid, to try to fool the public into believing that net zero is not in their best interests and is not about stopping the suffering. But 3,000 to 4,000 people were killed this summer by heat. The Met Office announced on Monday that it was 70 times more likely by greenhouse gas levels than would have been the case without it.



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Part of the problem I think is the fact that Government have divided the climate brief between two Government Departments and, therefore, you cannot find Ministers who can make the connection between net zero policy and the benefits that we are trying to achieve—not just avoiding climate change impact but also demonstrably improving our energy security.

Again, when we come to misinformation we have had a lot of nonsense this week about North Sea oil and gas. It does not reduce consumer bills. We do not have enough oil and gas to make any difference to global prices for oil and gas. The only thing that will provide us with energy security is moving away from our dependence on oil and gas, because North Sea oil and gas is declining. It is regrettable that the Leader of the Opposition did not admit that production is in long term decline in the North Sea when she gave her speech earlier this week.

Chair: Thank you very much for those opening comments. One follow up question from Claire Young and then we will move over to Luke Murphy.

Q245 **Claire Young:** A quick question for Rebecca. You said that when you select them people say, “Well, we don’t know enough” and climate change is seen as a science issue. Does the wider feeling for many people that they do not understand science feed into it, and is there a reframing that would help people get their heads around it better?

Professor Willis: I think that the wider question is how you incorporate people’s own expertise into decision making around climate and energy. This is something that I have been doing in my role with the Climate Change Committee. To use that as an example, the Climate Change Committee has some of the best economic modelling, technical analysis and so on, and that is absolutely as it should be. That is the foundation of how we meet our carbon budgets, for example.

But if we are going to get the path to net zero right we also need to make sure that it is a path that works for people, that fits with their lives, that meets their expectations. It is entirely valid that we use social research to find out what people think and under what conditions they want to move forward.

That is why the Climate Change Committee introduced a citizens panel to provide that social evidence for the seventh carbon budget. It is very emphatically not just economic or technical analysis, important though that is, and I would not downplay the importance of that, but it is also people contributing their own experience and views on what could work. That has to happen for policy alongside a frank and open conversation about the science.

Claire Young: My concern was more that it was putting people off if they feel they do not understand that you are coming at it from all these different angles. If they see it as a science issue and they fear science more generally, does that put people off engaging in the issue. But



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maybe we will move on.

Chair: Maybe we can come back to that. We will move on to questions about the media's role in countering economic fears, with Luke Murphy.

Q246 **Luke Murphy:** Welcome to the panel. How much of a problem is media misinformation funded by fossil fuel lobbyists and other vested interests and maligned actors a problem, Bob?

Bob Ward: I do not think the evidence is that the misinformation is primarily funded by fossil fuel. The main problem we have is ideological divisions now around climate policy and a desire to make it a culture war issue—frankly, copying the dismal path that the United States has gone down on this issue.

There has been a very notable increase in the amount of opposition and misinformation in the media since the Uxbridge by-election. It started off as a misinformation campaign around the extension of the ULEZ, but then when the newspapers sensed that they could get away with a misinformation campaign on air pollution they thought they could do it on net zero and they have been basically carrying that out.

In my view I think the evidence is very clear that one of the reasons why Rishi Sunak backtracked on climate policy in September 2023 was that there had been a concerted campaign by the right-leaning press. There is no problem with them having their opposition, but it is the manufacture of fake news and the false information that they are putting out there that is leading to essentially undermining democracy. Democracy depends on people having access to accurate information, and at the moment they are manufacturing a series of stories that are at best misleading and in many cases inaccurate.

I have examples, but let me give you one, because it has affected a complaint I have made to the Independent Press Standards Organisation. An article by Andrew Neil last July claimed that the Committee on Climate Change had said that at net zero 25% of our energy would still be coming from fossil fuels. That is categorically untrue, but Andrew Neil has managed to get away with it, IPSO told me, because the Prime Minister and the Energy Secretary at the time had made that claim and, therefore, Andrew Neil was entitled to make that claim as if it were true.

We are seeing here a combination of various sources of misinformation—unfortunately, including MPs—combining to create an overall environment in which we have misinformation, making it incredibly difficult for the public to know what is true and what is not.

Q247 **Luke Murphy:** Roger, is that your experience as a journalist?

Dr Harrabin: Yes, and I think there is another issue, which is about how information is used. There might be an issue where there is a story where some facts and figures are given and very often what will happen will be the presenter—and God knows it is a terrible job to be presenting in



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broadcast because you have so many issues to be expert with—will not know what to say to challenge some allegation that might be completely outrageous.

One of the things I was suggesting in my 20-strong list was that there should be much better education for people who are communicating with the public from the Government and from local government. It would cost money, of course, but I think it is necessary. People need to have the confidence to rebut claims that are clearly crazy sometimes, or challengeable at best.

Q248 Luke Murphy: Anything you want to add?

Professor Willis: It is important not to confuse political polarisation and quite a savage media debate with where people are. Relating to what I was saying earlier, the political polarisation does not mean that there is public polarisation. As I said earlier, the real picture is very different on that.

Q249 Luke Murphy: At a previous panel when we had Luke Tryl in front of us from More in Common, I was quite surprised at the degree to which he said that the breakdown in the consensus was actually leading to more polarisation than maybe people had anticipated. The leader of the Conservatives changing their position and coming to an anti-science view, as Bob has suggested, and Reform has taken the same position, actually has had an impact on their supporters. Is it fair to say that it does have an effect on—

Professor Willis: Of course it has an effect, yes. It has an effect both ways. If influential people in the media or politics are coming out with these very sceptical lines then of course that will be picked up. We have seen that as a sort of slight drop-off in the polling, for sure. In the citizens' panels that we run we find some of the points that you mentioned, Bob, the misinformation coming through in terms of what people say about heat pumps or EVs or that sort of thing. Of course it has an effect. At the moment though, the overall concern for climate is holding up. But, yes, I am worried that this does come through.

It also would have an effect the other way, that if we have leaders in government, and other influential people as well, speaking up and making the case for climate action then that bolsters people. Of course the influence is there. That is against the backdrop of quite strong support at the moment. The UK population is in a different place from the US on that, for example.

Q250 Luke Murphy: Moving on to broader media rather than misinformation—I think, Roger, you have highlighted this both in writing and earlier on in your evidence—is there a problem in that the media too often focuses on the short-term economic costs and does not take into the wider economic impacts of runaway climate change, adaptation and the cost of failure to tackle climate change? Is that a media problem or is it reflecting a wider



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political debate that struggles with long termism and is often focused on short termism?

Dr Harrabin: We have had a very long unfolding of this debate. When I look back the first comment from the sceptics was that the world is not warming. This is a misreading of the temperatures. Then it was, "Okay, maybe the world is warming a bit". These have stretched over a years. Then, "Maybe it is warming a bit, but humans have nothing to do with it". Then, "Well, maybe humans are to do with it, but they are not much to do with it". Again, stretching over years and the debate slowly unravelling, and eventually they get, very grudgingly, to, "Well, perhaps humans are responsible in some way possibly, but anyway we cannot afford it".

That debate has been deliberately dragged back. In Bush junior's time George Bush sought advice on what he should do about the growing opposition to oil and gas and the growing concern about climate change. He was told, "You don't need to worry about it, you can't win the debate but how you can win is by keeping the debate going, that is all you need to do because that will stymie any cause for action".

The UK has been incredibly brave, and I think we should give credit to past Conservative Governments, as well as Labour, for the support they have given to sensible policy on this. But we now reached the stage where they are arguing about the nitty gritty of pounds and pence, which they were not arguing before. It is much more detailed.

As I said earlier, there may be a point to it. The actual cost of wind, for instance, may have been underestimated. But, goodness knows, every economic forecast is different from the other one. You put different numbers in, you get different numbers out. But going back to your point, the costs of inaction are absolutely unbelievably bad.

The Institute of Actuaries is warning that unless we do something very major, between 2050 and 2070 there will be a 50% hit on GDP. What? Why isn't this headline news everywhere? That is what presenters need to be asking people who come on. A Conservative spokesman will come on and say, "This is how much it will cost. We will withdraw from the North Sea Authority, and this is how we will deal with it". What we need to do is ask them, "What do you think we should be doing to combat this terrible crisis that threatens human society? What should we be doing?" Not just saying, "Okay, we will pull out".

- Q251 **Luke Murphy:** What should the Government and Parliament be doing? You mentioned the thing about Andrew Neil but there are questions around freedom of speech and so on, which others would argue about. What should the Government be doing to ensure that there is a genuinely reflective debate within the media around the economic costs of taking climate action, but also the much more significant cost of inaction. What is the role for Parliament and the Government in that?



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Bob Ward: Our newspaper self-regulatory system is broken and has been broken since Leveson and the failure to follow through on it. We now have a fractured system of dealing with complaints. The Independent Press Standards Organisation, for instance, is a misnomer. It is a complaints handling service for its subscriber newspapers. It is demonstrably not upholding the Editors' Code of Practice that requires newspapers to take care not to publish inaccurate and misleading information.

Indeed, the point you made that everything is a matter of opinion, so you can make any statement no matter how wrong it is and claim that it is a freedom of speech issue, is profoundly damaging to public debate. We have to take facts and evidence seriously because that is the only way you reach rational decisions. The Government need to explain their policies much more clearly and they need to talk much more about climate change.

It is notable that when Richard Tice was leader Reform UK had a manifesto that gave a page to climate change denial, straightforward denial of the impact of human activities on climate change. When Nigel Farage took over as leader he deleted that page, and when he goes in public he will not talk about it because he knows that the majority of the public support action on climate change and accept the evidence. They know that if they admit that what they are trying to do is make the case that climate change is not happening or—as Donald Trump is doing—pretend it does not exist, they lose public support. Hence they do not want to talk about climate change because they know that once they start expressing their denial of it that they will lose public support for it.

It is not a time horizon; it is about the framing of the argument. The more you make this about the relative costs the more it is biased towards them. Anybody in communications knows, if you want to win an argument the first thing you do is do not allow your opponent to frame what the argument is about. The Government need to be much clearer.

However, I would say that one thing that does need to happen is we need far more public institutions taking on the responsibility for communicating around this issue. That means empowering the Climate Change Committee to play a more active role in communication and public debate around it, and also organisations like Ofgem. Ofgem has been dismal in the current debate. At the moment you cannot find on its website a breakdown of electricity bill costs. The most recent figure it has on its website is from August 2021 and yet it has been a major source of public dispute and debate.

When I contacted Ofgem and asked why it had not published it, Ofgem acted as if it was odd that I should be asking for that information. It does not get it. We need more public institutions to take responsibility because the Government are not well-trusted on any issue. The Government need to explain their policies, but we need trusted public institutions as well



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that consumers and citizens can go to and think, "That information is accurate, and they have no vested interest in providing distorted information".

Dr Harrabin: Richard Tice's latest tactic, if asked about the science of climate change, is to say, "I am not expert in that so I can't comment".

Professor Willis: I want to make the point that is obvious but often overlooked that the main way a Government communicates is through its policy. This is not about a Government comms strategy; this is about what a Government do. The more that political leaders can do to show rather than tell that they are acting on the climate crisis, and to show how that aligns with economic and social goals, the better. If there is that confident leadership then people will respond to it. The problem is that if that leadership is not forthcoming there is a vacuum, and we know that can be easily filled by misinformation.

I think it is absolutely legitimate to think about policies not only in terms of do the cost benefits stack up, is it economically the right thing to do; but also is this an engaging and motivating policy. The things that we talked about in the previous Committee around community ownership of renewable energy, local public transport provision, those kinds of things are visible, motivating, and positive. They help people with their lives and bring emissions down.

So this is not, "Do we sell it on climate, or do we sell it on other benefits?" It is not either-or. It is emphatically both-and. The more that you can connect with those other priorities that people have in their lives and the other political priorities, the more you get on the front foot about that leadership and the harder it is for the sceptical voices to get a hold.

Chair: Thank you very much. Claire Young.

Q252 **Claire Young:** If I could start with Bob on this one, because you have already mentioned credible messengers. Who do you think those credible messengers are that the Government could deploy to counter attacks? I am thinking particularly on the energy transition as opposed to the climate crisis itself. How should their impact be evaluated?

Bob Ward: Let me make a distinction between messengers who are out there to defend the Government's policy and messengers who are out there to help the public understand more firmly the issues that they have to make decisions about. The two are not the same at all. Part of the problem is blurring of that distinction; that is why I mentioned the importance of the Climate Change Committee and Ofgem, which are supposed to be primarily supporting and helping the public.

The Government need to explain their actions and motivations. Some will be easy to explain, others will not. I think the Government's explanation around the ban on exploration is very poorly explained at the moment



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and needs to be much more firmly explained. There is a logic to it one can understand.

The International Energy Agency has made quite clear we already have enough oil and gas reserves to blow through the budget for 1.5°. There is no justification for further exploration. The UK needs to demonstrate by leadership that it is willing to not do any more exploration and the mismatch between granting domestic licences but supporting a 1.5° target was something that the last Government did not explain.

That kind of incoherence and inconsistency in government policy between what they do and what they say, as Rebecca said, leads to distrust of government and a lack of support for actions, particularly if the public are being asked to do things where they think they are bearing the burden. The last panel emphasised—and this comes across time and time again—the majority of the public are willing to support and indeed make sacrifices themselves if they feel that it is well worth it and they feel it is fair, that everybody else is doing their fair share.

When government policy comes across as confused or incoherent and inconsistent it undermines public understanding, public trust, and the public willingness to participate in doing it. However, there is a distinction between communication around justification of public policy and building public knowledge and understanding of the issues in which they need to participate as part of the democratic process.

Q253 **Claire Young:** You mentioned Ofgem and the Climate Change Committee as being people who should be helping the public to understand things. Do you think the public see them in that light?

Bob Ward: They do not at the moment because they are invisible. I was on LBC a few weeks ago talking about climate change and before me was Grant Shapps, a former Energy Secretary, who went on and tried to discredit the Climate Change Committee and accused it of being biased. That was disgraceful. The Climate Change Committee is a demonstrably independent expert body that is tasked with providing information to the Government and to Parliament with independent expert advice. I think anybody who knows anything about it can see that it bends over backwards, but it essentially does not engage in communication because it is outside its remit. Frankly, it would command greater respect and gain more trust than any Government Department or Government Minister is able to do.

It should be absolutely key to Ofgem's current operation that they should be trying to seek good public understanding of the issues around our energy bills. They should be front and centre of it. They are virtually absent from the discussion at the moment, and it is hopeless. As Rebecca pointed out, in the absence of good reputable authoritative information it gets filled with crap and misinformation.



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Dr Harrabin: I have tried to engage the Royal Society on this because I think it is probably trusted. However, it is not interested because it is far too controversial. I am dubious about whether the public or all of the public would be completely trusting of the Climate Change Committee because it has “climate change” in its title and was set up by the Government, so I think there may be residual distrust there.

The more articles or press launches or initiatives you could get coming through the OBR or the Institute of Fiscal Studies the better. Our business correspondents would recognise them as being reputable in a way they probably would not do with the Climate Change Committee.

Q254 **Claire Young:** Rebecca, did you have anything to add on the subject of messengers?

Professor Willis: In terms of the regulators and so on we did some work specifically on this looking at policies to manage advertising of high carbon products and services. People felt strongly that they wanted advice, and the organisations they wanted in the driving seat were independent from the industry and independent from the Government. There is quite a lot of support for that sort of arm’s length approach.

Q255 **Claire Young:** So you would not support local business leaders, for example, as being useful messengers in this?

Professor Willis: One thing I was reflecting on in the previous session and this one so far is that there has not been a discussion about local leadership. The evidence on this is pretty clear.

Polly, you know more than anyone about this, but the more that you can give powers and responsibilities to local areas to shape climate responses in ways that work for those communities—and, yes, that includes involving local business leaders and local politicians; we have seen this happen effectively in some of our big cities, for example—the more that is effective. The climate agenda, and to a certain extent the energy agenda, has to be one of devolving powers and responsibilities, not least because people have that connection to their local area.

The last thing I would say is the trusted messengers par excellence have to be people themselves, which is why it is a missed opportunity of Climate Assembly UK, for example, much as I and others tried. You have then 100 people who have been through this process but are still part of the community that they came from, having been through this experience, and they can act as incredible spokespeople for the challenge. Some of them did but that was practically ignored by the Government at the time.

An impressive thing to do would be for a politician to say, “This is our new strategy, and it is not just people like me who have created it; it is these people in the Climate Assembly and people from all walks of life have come together and agreed this is the right thing to do”. That is a



powerful motivator for people, so sometimes the best messengers are normal people who have been involved in these discussions.

Q256 **Claire Young:** If I can get quick answers to a final question from me. Do people link climate change concerns with policies labelled as “energy transition” or “net zero”? Do they see that link?

Bob Ward: My experience is people do not necessarily make the connection between them, and indeed there is a considered effort to try to misrepresent what net zero stands for, as I mentioned—the attempt to portray it as an arbitrary Government target and to disconnect it from the climate change issue. Net zero means stopping climate change. If you are against net zero you are against stopping climate change; that is what should be happening every time a Government Minister talks about net zero.

It is about stopping climate change. There is overwhelming public support for it. This embarrassment about, “Let’s not mention climate” is not appropriate here. The reason is because most people can now see with their own eyes that there is something going on and are joining the dots for themselves. Talking about climate change is a real benefit in explaining the justification for action, it is not a problem to be hidden.

Dr Harrabin: Can I come in about the net zero title? Net zero was born from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change trying to work out a way that allowed us to cut our emissions so that we could cut but then still be able to deal with the emissions that were left behind.

Given the rate that we are burning our peat moors and our forests, the thought of them storing carbon in the future is probably pretty over-hopeful. If you went to any comms expert when you were launching policies on this they would have said, “Don’t use net zero, people won’t understand it, and if they don’t understand it they won’t trust it and then you’ll be in trouble”, and that is exactly what has happened.

People do not know what net zero is, and once you mention net zero they look puzzled and then you have to say what it is, and what it is is complicated. It opens then a whole load of other questions. You cannot afford to have a title that opens three tiers of questions. It has to be something simple. For instance, Ed Miliband has obviously recognised this because over the past several months now he has been not using “net zero” so much and more concentrating on health benefits, people having warm homes, cheaper bills in the longer term. That is where he is looking and that is I think where the polling suggests he needs to look so I think he is on the right track. He needs to be backed by others in and around government, as Bob was saying.

I would put a ban on net zero unless it was absolutely necessary. He is using the phrase “clean” something or other, I cannot remember what, but I would call it probably clean economy. You could kick the idea around. For me that should be what the Government are saying, and



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then if they come on and say, “We are going for this clean economy” people want that, and then some Opposition member comes on and says, “No, we do not want net zero” then that throws the balance in favour of the Government in the first place. I would love to see that debated.

Chair: It is in the name of the Department, of course.

Dr Harrabin: Yes, they could change that in the next five minutes.

Chair: Melanie Onn.

Q257 **Melanie Onn:** Thank you. I wondered if part of the problem with the Climate Change Committee—not only the fact that it has “climate change” in the title—is it is seen as being a bit preachy. When it came out with its first report it basically told people, “You can’t eat burgers”—there are lots of things that you do in your normal life as normal people that you will not be able to do, should not be doing, should be reducing, should be making massive changes, which felt very authoritarian. Has the trusted voice been ruined as a result of that report?

Bob Ward: Let’s be clear, the Climate Change Committee never said any of those things. It did not say you cannot eat meat. Part of the problem has been people misrepresenting the findings of the Climate Change Committee.

Melanie Onn: It is a paraphrase of what people—

Bob Ward: It is an inaccurate paraphrase. It is a misrepresentation.

Melanie Onn: It is not a misrepresentation when the takeaways are that, from that report.

Bob Ward: No, the takeaways, or the ones you have described, are the people who want to create opposition to it. The attempt—

Melanie Onn: I do not think that is true. I genuinely do not think that is true, I have to say. I think that was a piece of information that has stuck with people.

Bob Ward: Do you think they should not have mentioned diets at all?

Professor Willis: Can I come in here with my CCC role?

Melanie Onn: Yes.

Professor Willis: The Climate Change Committee has the job of advising Parliament and the Government on a carbon budget trajectory and offering advice on how that could be met, most importantly putting forward a solid base of evidence, which shows that those targets are desirable and achievable. It absolutely does not dictate policy, so its aim is to put that very rigorous information in the public domain for Parliament and the Government and decisions about how different



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policies are developed is absolutely up to the Government and Parliament.

As part of that process, it is incumbent on the CCC to look at what the options are. I would say that if you look at the carbon budgeting process they are pretty conservative about some of those measures that you might call behaviour change or energy demand reduction, because so far there has not been very good evidence on what those levels of reduction could be.

Part of my work with the CCC through the development of citizens' panels is to provide better social research so that we do get an idea of exactly that—what dietary change people might be interested in, whether people would support different approaches to pricing, air tickets in such a way that that reflects the climate costs of aviation and those sorts of things. The CCC has been testing that out through social research, but it is absolutely up to government to make the policies.

Q258 Melanie Onn: Earlier in the evidence session you were saying about information being selective, incomplete, misleading. To what end? What is the purpose behind that misinformation? What do the individuals who do that gain from it in your view or is it unintentional?

Bob Ward: It is always difficult to know what people's motivations are and it is dangerous to try to ascribe motivations to it but the systematic nature of the way in which information is being distorted gives the impression that when—

Melanie Onn: It sounds a bit conspiracy theorist.

Bob Ward: If it is deliberate then you would expect it to happen over and over again and with consistent lines of messaging. It is entirely possible that the reason Richard Tice claims that volcanoes are responsible for rising carbon dioxide levels is his deep ignorance of the climate science. I rather suspect that it is not, though. He is a smart guy; he could look up for himself the fact that it is unequivocal that rising carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are due to primarily fossil fuel emissions. It is very difficult not to be absolutely clear that that is what is happening.

What is clear is that many of our newspapers and parts of our broadcast media are engaged in a consistent line of messaging that is designed to provide a distorted view of the information around climate change and climate policy. They view it as a legitimate exercise of their right to broadcast and print and are ignoring the right of the public to have access to accurate information.

Q259 Melanie Onn: Why? Why is that happening? Why do they do that? I wanted to come in also because you were talking earlier about journalists perhaps not being fully informed enough to be able to rebut some of the claims, particularly if you get somebody who is putting forward quite wild



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suggestions—that they do not have enough time to be informed, the news is moving too quickly, we do not have sufficient specialists. What is going on?

Dr Harrabin: Can I stick on the Climate Change Committee one first? It is quite clear, according to the science, that we cannot combat climate change in any meaningful way unless we do something about emissions from agriculture, and that primarily comes to beef and then lower down—

Q260 **Melanie Onn:** I think we have answered that question, to be honest. If we can move on to the other points.

Dr Harrabin: Okay. You were asking about how we are not allowed to eat meat because as soon as—

Melanie Onn: Like I said, I think we have answered that question, but I do want to go to the integrity of journalism.

Dr Harrabin: I do not wish to impugn the integrity of journalists at all. There is an awful lot to know and an awful lot to learn in an extremely complicated area. It is a good thing that this is happening but there is something of a tussle between the environment unit in the BBC, the business unit and the politics unit of who is going to cover X story, whatever X story is.

You will find that somebody from the business unit obviously does not know as much about it as the environment unit in this case, but the environment unit has missed out in the battle for who gets the story, so you are left with somebody potentially less well informed but also striving to meet BBC impartiality standards. Therefore being very careful of saying, “Oh, well, the Conservatives say it is going to cost X amount” or “Labour say it is going to cost Y amount” and there might be, for instance, a great hinterland of work showing that the Labour figure was correct, but the reporter might not feel able to offer that sort of perspective. That is what I mean. I do not mean anybody is being unprofessional. It is extremely difficult.

Q261 **Melanie Onn:** The term “carbon budgets” has been used twice in the evidence that we have had, and you hate that phrase.

Dr Harrabin: I hate it, yes.

Q262 **Melanie Onn:** What would Rebecca have been better off using instead of “carbon budgets”?

Dr Harrabin: I think unfortunately—and this comes again to a problem with broadcasters—as Polly will tell you, there is an incredible shortage of time in broadcast to tell a story, whether in seconds or in print. I have lost myself.

Q263 **Melanie Onn:** So talking about the Climate Change Committee and the work that it has been involved in, and the phrase “carbon budgets”, I am intrigued to know, what are the alternatives? Net zero? You made the



point that using net zero is the kiss of death on anything.

Dr Harrabin: I think you have to go for half a sentence. I cannot think of anything off the top of my head. I will get back to you when I have a clearer brain.

Q264 **Chair:** Thank you. We will move on now. TV and radio according to Ipsos is still seen as the most informative source on this subject and indeed others. How do those who want to promote the desperate need for action get their voices heard? Bob, I think you are doing quite a lot of it. How do you think other people get on?

Bob Ward: I have a large argument constantly about this—so I go on GB News to make arguments, because I do not believe that the GB News audience should only hear one side of the argument. People have argued, “Oh, if you go on it gives them credibility”, but it continues broadcasting whether I go on or not. The difference is it might have somebody on who does a less good job. What does give credibility is if you go on and you perform badly, and part of the problem with the climate community—and particularly with scientists—is that they think that because they are right they win an argument.

Frankly, if you think you can win an argument by being right you have never been in a loving relationship. Essentially, the issue here is that you need more people who know how to argue properly and debate in public debate. Indeed, we have been training climate scientists how to debate properly, and you need more people to be willing to do this because you must have that debate.

There is a requirement through the broadcasting code, a legal requirement, for broadcast news on TV and radio to be accurate. That is a statutory requirement, and I think the standards are probably slightly higher in our broadcast media than in the self-regulated newspaper environment where it is the wild west at the moment in terms of coverage of climate change. I do think that Ofcom needs to be a bit more active in enforcing the rules around accuracy, but I do not think boycotts of particular outlets are a sensible way forward. This is about winning the arguments and that means being more than just right.

Q265 **Chair:** That is very helpful. We have Ofgem and Ofcom involved now, so I wonder if we can get any other regulators in. DESNZ in its evidence to us says that scientists at universities at 85% and scientific organisations at 83% are the two most trusted sources of accurate information on climate change, and that four in 10 people they have conducted research with say they trust these a great deal. They have also told us that a key element of their strategy is working with trusted voices from academia and civil society organisations and they also want to engage with community voices who can speak authentically.

I am conscious of what you have just said about making sure not just to have those voices but that those voices win arguments. Are those the right people? Should there be an army being trained to advocate for this



from those places or from elsewhere?

Bob Ward: Let me just make the distinction again. It is Government's job to justify Government policy, but there is also an interest in making sure that the public are well informed as part of the democratic process so that they can participate properly in it. I am also a member of the Burton Bradstock Parish Council down in Dorset. It is meeting this evening but unfortunately I am missing that meeting. Part of the challenge that we have at local level now—and a lot of the implementation of the Energy Trust initiative is a local issue—is the complete absence of a communication strategy at the moment, so it is very difficult.

Dorset Council came to us and wanted to install one public EV charging point in the village for free. I could not find a place in the village for it. When I talked to my neighbour, who is a driving instructor, he told me, "Oh, in any case, EVs are not nearly as environmentally friendly as they are made out to be. I read that in the *Daily Mail*".

That is the problem. They are getting sources of misinformation and there is no real concerted local-level roll-out of explanation of either national Government policy or at local level, because as we mentioned local councils have been starved of funding and just cannot afford the outreach and engagement strategy that is necessary, given the scale of the transformation—

Q266 **Chair:** Do the three of you agree that local sources of information are more likely to be trusted?

Dr Harrabin: Definitely, yes.

Q267 **Chair:** So creating that capacity at a local level is key?

Dr Harrabin: In talking about arguments, one very potent way of winning an argument is by building stuff that works. As Bob was saying earlier on, if you go around next door and they have had a heat pump fitted, or if you can show green jobs, or clean jobs as I prefer to call them, in the vicinity or showcase technology, all of these are really good arguments.

Bob Ward: Can I just make a point that there is a massive local misinformation campaign going on? If you look at solar farms at the moment they are facing local opposition that is employing misinformation about, "Oh, they can burst into flames at any moment, and the batteries will burn at furnace level" and again I am afraid MPs have been part of that misinformation. The MP for Nottinghamshire claiming that they should not build a solar farm in her constituency because it will blind the pilots of the Red Arrows and lead them to crash is a level of misinformation that everybody should be ashamed of.

Q268 **Chair:** Before I hand over to Polly Billington, Rebecca, do you have anything to add on those questions?



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Professor Willis: Obviously as a university professor I am basking in those levels of approval. I would say that not necessarily in terms of the level of everyday communication but certainly in our decision-making processes we must give priority to really good information. One of the reasons that academics are trusted is because we are held to very high standards, peer review, ethical standards and so on.

I saw this first hand in the legal process around the Cumbria coalmine in which I was involved. We had very eminent scientists and economists making the case based on the science that opening a new coalmine is incompatible with our international commitments, yet that was countered by evidence that was brought forward by the mining company with people without those same credentials being treated in the same way. In terms of our official decision-making processes in Parliament, in judicial procedures and so on, we absolutely need to discriminate between good-quality evidence and the rest.

Q269 **Chair:** Just before I go to Polly, Roger, this point about non-equivalent witnesses being produced on the media in the name of impartiality when you are not comparing like with like, how do we deal with that?

Dr Harrabin: I do not know. It was a really big problem in the early days when I was reporting the climate change debate because editors would come and say, "Where is the sceptic voice here?" and I had a producer from 5 Live come and say his editor had told him that he would be sacked if he did not find somebody to say the story was rubbish. It is quite a high level of problem.

Things changed when Fran Unsworth, who was then head of news, made a declaration with a rather odd phrase which was, "The referee has blown his whistle, and the game is over, and we no longer have to have an oppositional voice on climate change" but people still feel the need to push for it. It is a basic journalistic need to push back, "Here are some facts. Let us push back at them".

Q270 **Chair:** Yes—it doesn't feel like that. It feels like now we have restarted the match, unfortunately.

Dr Harrabin: You could try meeting with BBC people. They are supposed to be responsive to the public.

Chair: We are wandering into the DCMS Committee's remit at this point, but it is a point well made. We will move on to Polly Billington and local and national messaging. She might want to ask follow-up questions on solar panels, for example.

Q271 **Ms Polly Billington:** I feel like I could have heard this evidence at any time since 2008. For full disclosure, I obviously worked with Roger, and I have worked with Becky on the Assembly, and I know Bob quite well too. In 2008 and 2009 in the run-up to Copenhagen negotiations a scientist was revealed to have used the word "trick". I recommend doing a drama documentary of it, by the way. We realised that frankly scientists and



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academics are not to be trusted with communications because they took days to come up with a rebuttal. In the meantime, Nigel Lawson and the rest of them had got their boots on and were flying round the world and destroying the reputation of the scientific climate community and we have been spending quite a lot of time making up for that ever since.

I ask you as professionals who think about this a lot why we are still talking about the BBC and the *Daily Mail* when a significant amount of the ways that people consume their ideas, their information, has been transformed since 2008 and that “trick” story would have got around even faster and been even more of a problem. I do not get a sense from what you are saying that there are new and fresh strategies to address the new and fresh challenges that we have on communication and misinformation in a very new world of communication on anything, let alone science and the rigour that we are talking about.

Dr Harrabin: I totally agree with you. It has not changed much, the impetus.

Q272 **Ms Polly Billington:** But TikTok and Twitter have changed quite a lot so what I am saying is what, therefore, should be the new strategies that deal with the current situation as distinct from us basically saying IPSO is no good, Ofcom is terrible, we can blame the *Daily Mail* for everything and everything is quite difficult inside a broadcast studio? None of those things have changed. That is almost like the laws of gravity. We cannot defy them so what can we change?

Dr Harrabin: I am by no means a news media expert, as you can tell, but one of the things that I was suggesting was that Government Departments or a Government Department should have a disinformation unit that is chasing through disinformation as it comes up on the web.

That trick thing, of course—I do not know how much you followed it—was almost certainly a Russian disinformation campaign. The scientists later explained what they meant by “trick”. It was a mathematical thing, “If you do this thing this way you get the sensible result” and they were not to blame but the scientific community behaved extremely poorly and drew wagons around the issue rather than letting it be fully openly debated.

Q273 **Ms Polly Billington:** Have we learnt any lessons from that experience?

Dr Harrabin: I think the Royal Society, which was instrumental in this, probably has a memory of it. I hope it would, but there is so much nonsense on new media. I was talking to a friend in Dorset the other day who has bought an electric car. She is very pleased with herself. She lives outside a village, and she says every time she opens up her Facebook there is somebody saying, “Oh, electric cars are much worse for the environment than petrol and diesel. Yes, they are bad, but petrol is better”. How do you combat that? I have no idea. It is not my remit unfortunately—or fortunately.



Bob Ward: There is one thing that is still the same and which is a major problem here. If you speak up you get attacked because the opponents of action know that one way in which they can win is by intimidating individuals. You can see that that is what is happening at the moment, with the vehemence and the vitriolic approach to, for instance, Ed Miliband as Secretary of State. The personal attacks on him go well beyond the opposition to his action and attempt to vilify him and make him a villain in the eyes of the public. That is a strategy, and that is what will happen with academics. They are afraid often of speaking up.

That was one of the key problems that I had at the time of the hacking of the emails. A lot of the academics did not want to stand up because they did not want to be made an example of. You will remember that Phil Jones who was at the centre of it was contemplating suicide because he was getting personal emails threatening his and his wife's lives. No academic signs up for that. I am not an academic. I signed up for the vilification I get constantly, much of which is amusing, but most academics when they sign up are not signing up to become the subject of personalised campaigns to discredit them.

That is why we must think very carefully around how we frame the debate. You cannot control discussions that go on but with the role of social media, one thing that is worth noting is that information that appears supposedly in a journalistic context, either as an item on TV or radio or in a newspaper, is given particular credibility on social media because people think it has been through a journalistic process that has filtered out misinformation. Unfortunately, as we know, there is quite a lot that appears in the media that really is misinformation and has not been filtered for whether it is accurate or not.

Q274 **Ms Polly Billington:** Can I just ask a couple of other questions? One is very specifically on therefore putting scientists and academics aside for one moment for some of the reasons that we have discussed, who would be effective, trusted messengers to be able to give people confidence that climate action is something that they can be part of and that the science is something they should be confident in? Bearing in mind that broadly speaking we have agreed—as Becky points out—that most people do agree that the science is there, these people should be pushing at an open door, generally, apart from having to deal with the trolls. Who should be those trusted messengers?

Professor Willis: The characterisation that things have not changed since 2008 I don't think is quite true, because the point on the science was lost. As Roger was saying that approach is very clear to people, not least in terms of their own experience of life now that climate change is happening. That is why the debate has moved on to criticising the policies and not the science, so I think let us take that as a win. I would also say look at the demographics of this. Essentially young people tend to have higher levels of concern about climate change, and they are users of social media, so I think it is a complicated picture.



Directly to your question about trusted messengers, I think it is no different with climate than other areas—it is people who are trusted in all sorts of ways. I am encouraged by the work that the health community has done to link health and climate change. You can look at what Wellcome has done, you can look at what *The Lancet* has done and so on, because there are obvious health and climate links and, generally speaking, the medical community is very trusted. That works for some people. I go back to what I was saying about local leaders, about people who have been part of climate assemblies, and this is how engagement happens in the wild.

While I am really worried about misinformation and disinformation, I do think that it has a particular fever and character between essentially elites, including in this place, and in the media, particularly the commentary places, and so it is old media where a lot of this is coming through. That is what is influencing the political dynamic.

If you are talking about public engagement you are looking at a much wider ecosystem of trusted messengers who could be used and one good example of that is the energy transition. Now we have the CBI speaking up hugely for clean energy. We have business leaders speaking up. We have local councils. We have a positive coalition behind renewables and other technological innovation. I think we should celebrate that and that could be a model.

Q275 Ms Polly Billington: One last question, which is going to sound weird in the context of local stuff, is the politics of despair, which is driven by, “Yes, but what about China?” which is undermining almost all of our policy arguments. However many thousand people died of heat stress this summer, people’s feelings of powerlessness are one of the biggest drivers of other levels of anxiety around other things, as well as climate, and what we have at the moment is a real politics of despair. How do you think we can and should counter that?

Dr Harrabin: People who we are training to be knowledgeable about climate change will have a ready list of answers to questions such as that. The China one is easily answerable. The one that is much less easy to answer is, “If we are doing it why isn’t Norway?” That really is a tricky one but on the China one it looks like their emissions are starting to fall—we cannot be certain yet—but they are by far the biggest producer of wind power and solar power and batteries, exceeding the US and the EU put together.

That is an easy one to bat back, but the Norway one is a bit more problematic. It is basically we are taking a stand because we started all this and yet we cannot persuade the Norwegians.

Professor Willis: We have done work specifically on despair and its counterbalance, hope, and we tracked some people who were involved in a citizens’ panel, and it is very interesting that as they get involved in that process and they see some of the solutions to the climate crisis and



some positive stories about the energy transition they get a real sense of hope, and it is quite a collective hope. Unfortunately if nothing happens afterwards they lose that and they become cynical and distrustful.

However, there is a model there where if you put forward this idea that there are answers and they are ones that improve quality of life in various ways, that improve local areas, that bring clean jobs in and so on, that is very motivating.

I think that those questions about, "What about China?" and so on are bound to come in if you paint this as an agenda of sacrifice, but if you start by the Government, rather than saying, "Can you change your behaviour and make sacrifices please?", instead say, "We understand that you are worried about the climate crisis and you want to be part of the solution, and it is our job to help you to do that", that is a motivating message.

Bob Ward: There is one gap I would like to just point out at local level. That is the practicalities of things such as getting heat pumps installed and solar panels. The consumer journey is still awful. Trusted independent advice about what you need is just not available. In fact, I think it is a bigger barrier at the moment than the cost to the implementation.

It is difficult. You cannot rely on private sector suppliers. They often do not give you accurate advice. They try to sell you the product that they want to, so it would be very helpful if the Government looked at setting up some kind of independent ombudsman that could be present locally and to which consumers could go for advice about it.

That would be a major undertaking, but frankly I do not see any way of us increasing the deployment rates of the technologies we need. Polly and I had a discussion on Twitter, which was surprisingly constructive, about the difference between air to water and air to air heat pumps. I think most consumers are unaware of that, but that is a major policy issue that ought to be discussed because air to air allows you to use it to deal with heat in the summer as well in a way that air to water cannot.

Q276 **Torcuil Crichton:** I want to respectfully disagree with Polly. I think we have heard some news today, and it is almost 6 pm so I can do a news summary, and you have told us that 3,000 or 4,000 people will have died this summer because of climate change. You have told us that the GDP will fall off a cliff by 2070 unless we act. You have told us that as a political class that we perceive opposition to climate change to be double what it is. You have broken a news embargo. You have told us that with very few exceptions—although you have not named them, I guess I will, Ed Miliband and Michael Shanks—that there are very few Ministers who are effectively sending that message out to the public to counter misinformation.

Ms Polly Billington: And Miatta.



Torcuil Crichton: Yes, and Miatta as well. So I just want to ask each one of you to give your top recommendation on how we change that story and how we change that message.

Professor Willis: I am happy to start. I think that my top recommendation would be to include people as equal partners in decision making. Stephanie Draper in the previous session talked about a permanent assembly or panel. That is one way of doing that. Making it very clear that this is Government and people working together to solve a common challenge. That would be my number one recommendation.

Bob Ward: We need to engage far more institutions nationally and locally in the engagement process in communication. The Government should be front and centre of explaining their policy, but we also need far more information available to the public that is dependable and accurate, both about the overall picture but also about the practicalities of them playing their part in the energy transition.

Dr Harrabin: I would like to scrap the phrase “net zero” except in exceptional circumstances, replacing it by clean economy and I would also—and this is two and it is cheating, but never mind, I am here—I would like people to start stressing the costs of inaction, because that is a powerful rebuttal.

Torcuil Crichton: Thank you all for your very lucid evidence.

Q277 **Chair:** That was very helpful. Thank you again. I was taking advice from somebody who knows a thing or two about this earlier today, in fact, and he said that in the last Labour Government one of the challenges was the switch over from analogue to digital TV, and in the end what made it relatively achievable was that digital TVs became very affordable for people. Is this a very significant part of the challenge, that it just is not attractive enough for people to make change?

Dr Harrabin: That is certainly true at the moment. There are myriad problems, and I do not want to go into all of them, but cost is a major one.

Bob Ward: People will understand about an investment, and Government should help poorer consumers, but one of the major problems we have at the moment is the fact that electricity is twice the price of gas and the current price of electricity has piled on to it all the levels, including the warm home discount, which was the single biggest factor in the increase in bills announced by Ofgem, which was ignored by the newspapers. The warm home discount helps poor consumers with their gas bills, and yet it is levied on electricity bills.

Professor Willis: Absolutely.

Bob Ward: It does not make any sense. We need people to get off gas and on to electricity, and no amount of communication is going to explain the illogical nature of having electricity at twice the price of gas.



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Q278 **Chair:** We have heard about that on our other inquiry, the cost of energy, so thank you. Rebecca.

Professor Willis: Yes, I echo those points. Cost is a factor, of course, but it is by no means the only one. There is the need for clear information, knowing that you are part of something more collective, there is thinking of this as a citizen rather than a consumer. These are all things that are more likely to make people want to be part of that transition.

In all of our research on this, and we have looked at a whole suite of policy areas, which is a very common pattern, "I am willing to play my part. Of course cost is an issue but if the wider framework is such that you make the decision easy for me, I am happy to do it".

Q279 **Chair:** Thank you. I think my final question is: should there be a simple analysis that is in writing that is very easy to communicate, that maybe even picks up the recommendations that you have just made to us, among others, which is widely available both nationally and locally, and who should produce it?

Dr Harrabin: I am not quite sure what you mean.

Q280 **Chair:** An analysis of why this matters. There are inquiries building the case for transition. Should there be an analysis set out that builds the case for the transition and who should produce it?

Dr Harrabin: Isn't one happening anyway?

Bob Ward: It is not quick enough though. I can recommend that Sir Nicholas Stern—the author of the Stern review, which that helped transform the discussion about the economics of climate change—has a new book out on 5 November, which is essentially making the argument much clearer about the economics of climate change, both in the UK and globally, and I think is an accessible one. It will be launched on 5 November, and I recommend it to everybody because I think it does an excellent job of explaining the economic arguments.

Chair: I shall certainly read that, but I was looking for something rather shorter than a book.

Professor Willis: I would throw that back and say I think it is the Government's job to set out that agenda very clearly, ideally on a cross-party basis.

Q281 **Chair:** We used to have the consensus and that is that challenge now, that we do not.

Professor Willis: I think demonstrating that consensus in other ways through being clear about public support, by being clear about business support and by laying out in very dispassionate terms the nature of the climate crisis and the huge benefits not just in terms of avoided climate risks but also the economic and social and health benefits, is absolutely



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something that national and local government should be doing as part of the bread and butter of their existence.

Q282 **Chair:** So what we used to call public information campaigns?

Professor Willis: No, it is not that. It is not proselytizing; it is just making it self-evident in what you do.

Bob Ward: One thing that we do need, Chair, is a very clear explanation of why the seventh carbon budget is being set as it is and what it means, because I think we are going to see for the first time next year a major attempt to stop the passing of a carbon budget, and that will be a significant new low in the quality of our public debate. We need government to explain in very clear terms why the seventh carbon budget is being brought in at the level it is and what it means going forward. Frankly, we should also ask the Climate Change Committee to also explain in very clear terms to the public the basis of its advice and what it means.

Q283 **Chair:** Thank you. I will leave Roger with the last word. Is there anything that we have not covered today? That could take a while, but is there anything in particular that we have not covered today that you want to leave us with?

Dr Harrabin: I will just throw you some of the embargoed stuff. I am trying to tread carefully around this, but I would like to share it with you. From 2023 to 2025, on average 58% of people say that the climate and environment crisis is a matter of great concern, yet the main traditional broadcasters covered the issue in just 35% of their TV and radio programmes.

Now of course you cannot make a programme by public opinion but that is an interesting point. By the way, that includes reports containing the merest mention of climate change, so they just said it once and that goes as a tick. Then interest only spikes around extreme weather or net zero. Even then analysis shows that energy stories often do not even mention the climate, to your point, Chair, leaving audiences without vital context.

During last year's Valencia floods, and I have said this before and I will say it again, just four out of 15 "News at Ten" programmes connected the story to climate change. Public concern about crime is around the same as climate change, but broadcasters cover the topic in around 90% of their programmes in contrast. I am also concerned about just how few lead stories there are in major news programmes. Normally it comes up in the bottom half of the bulletin and is looked to be some tricky new way of talking about it. We must find ways of broadcasting it higher.

Chair: Thank you all very much indeed. It was a long session but a very valuable one and we very much appreciate the evidence you have given us. I will encourage all of you, as we always do with our witnesses, if there are other things you wish to add please write to us. I dare say that you will not need any encouragement to do that, and thank you.