THE BIG CLIMATE CONVERSATION

Thank you for facilitating this workshop. Please summarise the group's comments under the following headings. If there were significant differences of opinion within the group, please mention this too.

The Big Climate Conversation: Event Feedback Note	
Organiser/Group	Assynt Development Trust
Venue	Lochinver Village Hall community room
Date	26th October
No. of attendees	24 (22 at event in person + 2 further non-attending contributors by email)

Overall, how much does the group know about climate change, net-zero, and/ or the climate emergency?

Everyone present knew about the basic principles of climate change, net-zero and the climate emergency. Many of those present had knowledge of some technical detail behind the basic concepts, such as IPCC report details.

One of those present rated the climate emergency as low importance to them compared with continuing with the current model of economic growth (rating it as a 1 on scale of 1 to 10). Everyone else present accepted there is a climate emergency and rated it very highly (19 people rated it 10, one person rated it 9, one rated it 8.)

Are members of the group already taking action, if not how could this be further supported?

Actions already being taken by individuals were not specifically discussed at the meeting. However, it is thought that most of those present, along with many in the wider community, are taking significant action as individuals / households, such as trying to reduce energy consumption including for transport, reusing and recycling, etc. Two individuals attending the meeting cycled over 5 miles on a dark October night to attend the meeting. Most others walked or car-shared. Several people specifically didn't attend in person as not wanting to contribute carbon emissions through travel to the meeting.
It was noted that many local people are living off-grid or/and using renewable energy. Some who can afford it are switching to electric vehicles. Many are cycling more and avoiding flying. There is an active local liftshare culture.

Most of the group thought that government funding is necessary for many important actions. eg. switching to electric vehicles, insulating homes, switching to renewable energy in homes.
Inadequacies of local public transport in this area were highlighted as a hurdled to reducing emissions through travel.
Issues with road safety for walking and cycling were highlighted.
The necessity of Government funding for better publicising climate issues and opportunities such as electric car loan scheme was also highlighted by the group.

What does the group think that Scottish Government should be doing to mitigate climate change? What can the Scottish Government do to engage people more on climate change?

The majority of the group thought that the Scottish Government needs to do all it can to mitigate climate change.

A general feeling at the event was that we should be aiming at negative rather than zero net emissions, and that if the targets to 2045 don't contribute enough to enable global achievement of what recent IPCC reports say is necessary to avoid the more majorly disastrous predicted scenarios of climate change, then they clearly are not ambitious enough.

Specific proposals included:
- Scottish Government and other Western Governments funding significant climate change mitigation in other less well-off 'developing' countries which otherwise will likely contribute high emissions.
- Taking actions to enable wider and more fundamental lifestyle changes away from the current consumerist model of society which is currently reinforced by capitalism's reliance upon ongoing economic growth.
- Introducing legislation to ensure new housing is heated by renewable energy.

The majority of the group thought that the Government should invest significantly in major publicity to engage and promote climate action including publicising opportunities, such as electric car purchase loan scheme.
It was also strongly felt that school age climate action education is inadequate and should be given a high priority within school curricula immediately.

The majority of the group supported most or all of the actions listed in Activity 5 of the Climate Conversation how-to guide. The ones highest prioritised were divestment from fossil fuels, paying more for flying, building more offshore wind turbines. A further action suggested was to incentivise installation of heat pumps for homes.

(Please see full report of the event, appended to this feedback form, for full details on this and other questions.)

Which actions did the participants feel would be the hardest to adopt/ change? How can the Scottish Government help to facilitate changes in those actions?

This question was not fully addressed due to time constraints. The Activity 4 outcomes discussed were:
All homes and buildings are insulated to the highest standards
Walking and cycling is easy and safe for short journeys (less than 3 miles)
Our homes are heated with renewable energy

A general point was made that for all the outcomes on the cards, cost is a major issue, and if the government doesn't fund the direct and indirect costs of them, they generally won't happen.

Any further comments:

Please see full report of the meeting and other feedback, appended below:

Minutes / Report of Climate Conversation Event, Lochinver Village Hall Community Room, 7pm, Saturday 26th October 2019

Present: 22 people.
Apologies: 6 people.

1. Introduction. Statement was read out from Scottish Government about purpose of the event:
"This event is part of Scotland's Big Climate Conversation. The Big Climate Conversation is a series of workshops, conferences, meetings, a written consultation and digital engagement that have been initiated by the Scottish Government in an effort to find out how individuals, businesses, and organisations across Scotland feel about climate change. This event is part of the public engagement segment of The Big Climate Conversation where the Scottish Government are seeking to hear from individuals about their thoughts on this issue.
This is also an opportunity for us to hear each other's views, understand different perspectives, and learn something new. It doesn't matter if you know a lot or a little about climate change. All views and opinions are welcome and will be respected."

2. Everyone present introduced themselves and gave their opinion of how serious they think the climate emergency is, on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all serious and 10 is extremely serious.
Quantitatively, the results were: 19 people thought the climate emergency was a 10, one person thought it a 9, one thought it was an 8 and one person thought it was a 1. Some qualitative explanations were given, including:
At least one person gave a 10 on basis that we need to make sure the government are made to do all they can to tackle it. The person giving a 9 said that from having a geological background, they recognised the near-inevitability of ecosystem changes including periods of mass extinction. The person giving an 8 said they did so as they thought climate change may not be irreversible. The person who rated it as a 1 stating the importance they saw in continuing economic development, such as exports to China, and how action such as Heathrow Airport expansion was important for this, including for themselves personally whose employment involves export of seafood overseas.   There was discussion of this, with the argument put forward that economic expansion can't continue given limited global resources. It was suggested by the one individual who argued for the current continuing economic growth model that technological developments and innovations may allow further economic expansion to continue despite finite resources. The overarching feeling of people present, with the one noted major exception, was that the climate emergency is real and of major importance, and that the government must do all it can to tackle it.

3. People were asked to give the word or phrase that came to their mind when hearing the phrase 'global climate emergency'. Words/phrases which came up were:
'Drought', 'fire', 'melting', 'zombie apocalypse', 'pollution', 'starvation', 'mismanagement', 'verging on delusional', 'wilful blindness', 'extinction', 'fear for everyone's future', 'rising temperatures', 'unprecedented'.

4. Marianne read out the following statement:
"The Parliament's Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee [18 June] voted in favour of a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target for 2045 and to raise the ambition of the 2030 and 2040 targets to 70% and 90% emissions reductions respectively. Scotland will be carbon-neutral, meaning net-zero CO2, by 2040 at the latest.
This means that by 2045, emissions from transport will be non-existent and emissions from heating, waste, energy, food, and industry will be massively diminished. Remaining emissions from these sectors will be captured by expanded and restored peatlands, forest, and other carbon capture technologies and practices. As a result, from 2045, Scotland will no longer be adding to global emissions."
People were asked to give views on whether these targets were too ambitious, not ambitious enough, or about right, and why.
A general feeling was that we should be aiming at negative rather than zero net emissions, and that if these targets don't contribute enough to enable global achievement of what recent IPCC reports say is necessary to avoid the

more majorly disastrous and possibly irreversible predicted scenarios of climate change, then they clearly are not ambitious enough. Some particular comments and discussion points (some of which are paraphrased here) were as follows:

Not ambitious enough.

Too slow.

We don't know for technical issues if faster may be possible – if it is then do it faster.

From understanding of IPCC report, this target isn't fast enough and needs to aim at negative emissions, ie. net carbon sequestration.

We need to ensure government knows how serious we think this is.

Not ambitious enough in the right areas.

One person believed nuclear power was sensible as a short-term energy needs solution to buy us time, but recognised that this was an unpopular opinion.

Discussion of the potential for more hydro energy.

Querying of whether peatland restoration can make much difference.

Discussion on whether there is enough suitable land for woodland creation. Two people were not in favour of creating woodland in ecologically valuable habitats such as limestone areas, and argued that some grasslands may be as valuable for carbon storage.

We need to think about things differently.

Discussion of the issue of the so-called developed countries being the consumers, and many so-called third world countries being major emitters. It was argued that western governments/countries need to fund carbon reduction in third world countries. It was suggested that we should pressure our government/s to do this.

It was noted that many 'third world' countries are actually at the forefront of many schemes to reduce emissions, including becoming net zero or net-negative. It was pointed out that countries, including China, do not need to retrofit existing carbon emitting technology, as is the case in western countries, which could give them a head start in combatting climate change.

It was suggested that there could be a more philosophical approach to our modern lifestyle. The consumerist society, to which we are largely addicted, and which is largely supported and pressed upon society by media and marketing, is not actually making us healthy and happy, rather the opposite. This was widely agreed with. The fact of life expectancy peaking and now going down in many western countries was noted in support of this. It was generally agreed that the government and society should take a wider view to take this into account and support and effect changes which, eg. reduced production and consumption of unnecessary goods, would benefit health and wellbeing as well as combatting climate change.

Discussion of the IPCC report and the avoidance of a >2°C global temperature rise from pre-industrial levels. Questioned whether the Scottish 2045 target is compatible with that.

5. The following statement was read out:

"*Climate Change is a structural, systemic problem. To achieve our ambitions we need to make a transition in our society. We know some of the changes which must happen but we know there are barriers to enacting them. We want to hear from you on how we can overcome these together.*

"*These cards show a number of societal changes that experts have suggested Scotland will need to adopt in order to reach net-zero emissions by 2045. These are a few of the most often suggested changes but there are blank cards for you to add your own suggestions if you want to.*" The cards were handed around, and rather than separate into groups to discuss them, it was suggested and agreed to discuss them as a whole group to assess what were felt to be the most significant challenges in achieving the changes.

Cards were read out and discussed one by one in this way, but as short on time, not all cards were covered.

A general point was made that for all the outcomes on the cards, cost is a major issue, and if the government doesn't fund the direct and indirect costs of them, they generally won't happen.

All homes and buildings are insulated to the highest standards
Cost challenge.
Materials – noted that at present most insulation materials are ecologically damaging. It was suggested that better alternatives should be used such as sheep's wool and waste paper-based insulation.
Noted that audit work would be needed.
For older buildings and listed buildings there may be difficulties.
New houses are needed, and this outcome needs to be designed for all new housing.

Walking and cycling is easy and safe for short journeys (less than 3 miles)
Older people may not find cycling easy. Electric bikes were mentioned as a good option for older people. An example was given of an older individual who had been using one of the new Assynt E-bikes, and had reported significant benefits to their health and fitness. It was agreed that cycling, especially on E-bikes, is indeed good for health and fitness of older people.
In relation to safety for this outcome, the NC500 route was mentioned and the high amount of vehicles on local roads often with low understanding of safety issues for walkers and cyclists. Driver education, and cycle / path infrastructure, are necessary to ensure safety.
Mention was made of £35,000 6 year interest-free loan being available from Energy Saving Trust for purchase of electric cars, along with grant towards cost of home car-charging equipment. It was noted how few people knew about this. It was agreed that the government needs to ensure everyone finds out about these opportunities. Investment in publicity/marketing is essential. It was noted that a major marketing campaign had been undertaken for 'are you ready for brexit?', and agreed that something an 'are you ready for climate emergency?' or 'are you ready for extinction?' campaign would be a better use of public funds, and should be done.
It was suggested that the poorest people wouldn't be able to afford electric cars even with this loan, so there is an issue of class-divide and access being only for the better off. While this was accepted, it was argued that such a loan scheme is still a good thing for addressing climate change as more electric cars will help reduce emissions, even if poor people are disadvantaged in access.

Our homes are heated with renewable energy
Agreed this should be made mandatory for all new housing, with legislation to outlaw non-renewable heating in new buildings.
Some discussion of whether this outcome included electric heating from grid, with grid electricity being renewably generated – it was assumed it does.
Noted there is no tradition in UK of district heating systems, and that in UK there is an ideology of personal choice in setting temperature of private homes. Suggested that education is needed about this, including at school age for the sake of future home keepers. The two school age people present were asked about the amount of climate change education they received. They stated that there has not been enough (at secondary school level). There was one day in the last year concentrating on such issues, which included making posters with non-biodegradable glitter, as an example of climate education in the school being backwards and missing the point. It was agreed that climate education should be immediately put on the curriculum of all schools in a significant way. Examples given of things which could be included in such education were home-economics-type lifestyle education such as repairing things, reuse and upcycling, and things like wiring plugs which seem not to be taught at present.
Such education needs systematising and funding.
It was noted that in crises and emergencies in the past, particularly World War II, major changes in behaviour were successfully implemented in a very short space of time, such as local / household-scale food growing.
As a cautionary note, one person mentioned that 'Freedom' is the rallying cry for much of the rest of the world, and that what we are proposing is arguably pushing the other way, towards a more regulated society. This point was generally taken on board, but perhaps as something to keep in mind in the medium term rather than a reason to favour not increasing legislation to promote emissions reductions at this time of accepted emergency.

There was discussion of marine plastic. It was noted that marine vessels generally come into port with little or no waste, the implication being that it is all dumped overboard at sea, contributing significantly to marine plastic, which is an issue we are acutely aware of in this particular coastal area. A proposal was made that legislation should be introduced to fine vessels which do NOT bring back into port the amount of waste material which would be expected. (At present, it was stated, vessels are charged per volume for disposing of waste material which they bring into port, hence the dumping of waste at sea for economic reasons.) This proposal to fine vessels for *not* disposing of waste in ports was agreed to be something the government should put in place.

As a return from discussion veering away from this particular card, the use of local woodland as a home heating source was suggested. Local woodland, including sustained existing woodland and newly created woodland, could be used as a local resource for woodfired heating, including skills development. This was agreed as a good idea, both locally to Assynt and elsewhere.

[The remainder of the cards were unaddressed due to time constraints.]

6. The following statement was read out:

"*A global climate emergency requires that we act now. Here are some suggested actions to take.*

These cards show a number of necessary actions that experts have suggested Scotland will need to adopt in order to reach net-zero emissions by 2045. These are a few of the most often suggested changes intended to provoke discussion but there are blank cards for you to suggest your own actions to discuss if you want to."

Cards were handed out to groups of around 4-6 people, and laid out in order of priority, with opportunity to add other ideas for actions.

The below table shows how groups ranked the actions, with 1 being 1st (highest priority), 10 being 10th (lowest priority):

group	1	2	3	4	5	average ranking	standard deviation
Public 'divestment' from fossil fuels	1	4	3	1	4	1	1.4
Pay more if you fly more	3	5	2	4	1	2	1.4
Build more offshore wind turbines	5	1	7	2.5	2	3	2.2
Phase out North Sea oil and gas extraction	2	7	4	2.5	6	4	1.9
Incentivise tree planting	6	3	5	7	5	5	1.3
Create a 'circular economy' in Scotland	4	8	1	5	8	6	2.6
Tax processed meat, beef and lamb to reduce consumption	7	10	8	6	3	7	2.3
Improve the planning of towns and cities to prioritise public transport, walking and cycling	8	9	6	8.5	7	8	1.1
Introduce variable tariffs for electricity	9	6	9	8.5	9	9	1.2
To sell your home it must meet a minimum energy efficiency rating	10	2	10	10	10	10	3.2
additions:							
incentivise installation of heat pumps for homes						3	

Notes:

Group 4 noted they chose to rank certain actions low because those actions were already occurring so didn't need prioritising.

Group 5 added one action*, incentivised installation of heat pumps*, in third place, before *public divestment* (de-investment) *from fossil fuels*. For ranking purposes, this was separated from the main 10 actions which everyone prioritised.

The fact that so many groups rated legislation for high home energy efficiency so low, despite the earlier discussion seeming to suggest widespread support for this action (see item 5), perhaps could suggest that most people considered most or all of these actions as important even those ranked low down.

7. People were then thanked for attendance, and any questions were welcomed.

A question was asked about access to local knowledge in food growing, such as knowing which varieties of vegetables do best here. Contacts were suggested, including Drumbeg Garden Group.

Zero Waste Assynt Facebook group was mentioned.

It was suggested that people could aim to make Assynt an exemplar in some areas of fighting climate change.

It was suggested Assynt Development Trust could lead on keeping this conversation going.

One attendee, representing the environmental working group of Ullapool Community Trust Climate Action, mentioned Climate Action Lochbroom, which involves asking all groups, organisations and businesses in Lochbroom to agree to incorporate climate action into their activities in a significant way. They also plan to introduce a 'did

you know' feature, to regularly publish some information on climate change / climate action. It was suggested by others that something similar could be done in Assynt.

The main event closed, followed by further unrecorded informal discussions.
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Addendum:
Further input was welcomed by other means outwith this main event. The following written input was received from local individuals:

From someone who chose not to attend:

I'm not planning to go – I don't want to add 16 miles' worth of exhaust emissions to the atmosphere, and the points I would like to make can be better expressed in an e-mail (which probably also adds CO_2 …). It would be interesting to know how much CO_2 the meeting as a whole contributes! However, you did ask for thoughts and ideas, so here goes.

The main point I would like to make is that instead of lecturing us, the Scottish Government must set an example in order to shift the behaviours of the public. It should take action by legislative or other means to do the following:

- restrict flights and mileage driven in petrol/diesel vehicles by Scottish Government and Council employees

- replace ALL petrol and diesel vehicles owned by the Scottish state and Scottish councils with hydrogen powered or electric vehicles

- ensure that ALL buses, coaches and taxis travelling on Scottish roads are electrically powered or hydrogen powered, as far as its powers will allow, and make a "pollution charge" on such vehicles that don't comply.

- only when the public see electric/hydrogen buses, taxis, refuse trucks, and other council vehicles operating locally will they feel secure in making a direct investment themselves in electric/hydrogen vehicles.

- provide more electric vehicle charging points to give confidence to those wishing to make private purchases of electric vehicles that they are not going to be left stranded or otherwise inconvenienced when making the long journeys that are a part of normal Highland Scottish life.

- publish plans to show how and by when this is to be achieved, and provide regular progress reports by an independent monitor from an environmental organisation.

- Publish (locally) what it is doing to insulate public buildings and other areas under its direct control to reduce energy consumption for heating and lighting

- Although we are going to need more renewable energy in the future we do not want on-shore wind-farms. They blight the landscape and do irreparable damage to the environment. It is unfortunate that some environmental organisations are so panic stricken by climate change that they are willing to destroy the environment to avoid it. The Scottish Government loses support for its environmental policies when it permits the building of on-shore wind-farms – an immediate moratorium should be put in place.

· Many people are now avoiding social media because it encourages polarisation of views, encourages "bubbles" of closed views to emerge, and ends up in emotive political debate rather than in sensible fact-based discussion which is respectful of differing views, so the Scottish Government is right to seek alternative means of communication with the public.

I followed the link you included, and it is interesting that it led straight to a political statement by Nicola Sturgeon. This issue should be above political grandstanding, which doesn't go down well with the public – it would have been better if you had linked direct to https://www.gov.scot/policies/climate-change/low-carbon-living/ , which contains some very useful information. I hope the meeting is not just another SNP campaign meeting telling everyone how successful the current Scottish Government is in tackling climate change, and instead deals with the areas I've outlined above, where it has much to do. No excuses, no ifs and buts, no telling us they can't do this and that until Scotland is independent – just get on with it. Politicians of all shades are as much a part of the climate change problem as they are the solution.

18/10/19

From someone unable to attend the climate conversation event due to illness:

My ideas are all to do with transport of course. I already suggested that Scheduled buses should be treated with more respect. For example, people often say they don't run on time when often the reason they can't is because of the traffic (often single occupancy cars) holding them up. I suggested to the Scottish Government, already, that buses should have a green light installed on the roof and when they are made late

by traffic conditions, they should be able to switch this on, flashing, and that traffic should be made to give way to them so that passengers do not miss their connections or appointments. Why should passengers be treated so badly? In a so-called equal society, they have the right to manage their lives as efficiently as anyone else.   Also why aren't bus passengers able to claim compensation when they are late, as well as train and plane passengers? All bus shelters should also have an element of simple seating and bus waiting rooms should be as comfortable and pleasant as train stations. Those in Inverness and Aberdeen are shockingly inadequate. It's embarrassing really. Surely folk who choose not to drive are doing the planet a favour? Also sharing transport with other people lends itself to greater empathy and sociability. I always meet really interesting people on buses and learn a lot, every time. Buses should be nationalised and free for everyone, also trains should be free for under 30s and over 70s and should charge the same rate for every mile travelled, no matter when or where. Longer trips should be more expensive to encourage living nearer work and shopping more locally. Buses should be marketed properly so people realise how much more pleasant it is to travel above the traffic, with great views, free wifi, comfy seats and cheery company. Children behave better when under public scrutiny and learn to integrate with society and adults learn to communicate with other sectors of society. Driving is stressful and it's lovely to let the responsibility lie with someone else, never having to worry about punctures, breakdowns, accidents etc. The age for gaining driving licences should be raised to 21 so that young people are safer and encouraged to seek healthy ways to travel. It is another symptom of inequality when we see an eighteen year old boy racing through a village and splashing an eighty year old who is compelled to walk to shops etc. through not being allowed to drive or losing their driving partner. Driving is the most anti-social thing we do; it's smelly, noisy and exclusive. People who drive down a street are unaware of what is actually happening on that street. It is the pedestrians or cyclists who can be good witnesses for crimes and even their presence prevents antisocial behaviour. Let's stop upgrading roads and make it easier to travel in company. Cars are a serious threat to our environment in so many ways. People don't even realise that sitting in a car, one inhales four times as much pollution as walking on the pavement beside them. Children need to learn how to travel independently and develop skills to protect themselves in a street full of living, empathetic people not empty apart from cars, which encourage folk to be lazy, not even willing to get out to ask the way.

26/10/19

From another person unable to attend the climate conversation event:

My thoughts are that renewables etc. won't stop the growth in carbon emissions. They would possibly, at best, just slow the growth down a bit. Like the government debt always grows no matter who is in power but sometimes it just grows a bit slower (generally if the Tories are in).

If any government is serious about stopping the growth in carbon emissions they have to deal with at least two things.
1. Population growth. The main driver in carbon emissions is the rise in human population. So we would need policies to reduce this.
2. Economic growth. Economic growth is the aim of every political party. However, there would need to be negative economic growth to reverse the trend in carbon emissions.

I would contend that neither of the above options would get many votes in a general election so we are probably stuck with sticking plaster remedies and kicking the can down the road.

By the way, my own carbon footprint is nothing to write home about!

9/11/19

From an attendee of the climate conversation event, by email:

A few additional thoughts following the meeting on Saturday night:

1) Most of the approaches to tackling climate change being discussed are looking at finding alternative means of enabling us to continue living our current lifestyles. A lot of the alternative ways (such as using renewable energy for electricity production or using electric cars) involve a considerable amount of manufacturing which will require extraction and transportation of resources, processing and further transportation etc. all of which will most likely have a considerable carbon footprint. I would welcome a discussion on why we are making the lifestyle decisions that we do as there seems to be growing issues with mental health, isolation, depression, disconnection with nature, obesity and more and I believe that a discussion on this may help lead to wider social and environmental benefits which the current model of continued economic growth and consumerism isn't meeting as well as help to reduce our carbon emissions.

2) While I see tackling climate change as necessary for our longer term survival I believe that many people may be resistant to proposed changes and legislation as it could negatively impact on their livelihoods and ultimately their short-term survival of having a job which pays for a roof over their heads and food on their plate. Any effort to reduce carbon emissions needs to also look at how we can continue to survive and thrive in the short-term as we navigate through this issue.

3) I see many problems linked to the current housing situation which favours big developers building houses with highly processed materials and selling them for high prices while many homes sit empty as holiday homes. This I believe leaves many people working long hours in jobs they often don't enjoy just to pay their rent or mortgage and because they work full-time and have to commute they then don't have the time or energy to use public transport, walk or cycle, to grow their own food and spend time with loved ones. I know other people who have managed to build a small eco-friendly wooden house using Scottish timber and local joiners for £20k. This small wooden house has a much smaller construction impact on the environment, is very efficient to live in and enables the residents to work part-time and lead a lower impact life through having more time, energy and money and arguably a better quality of life. However, land-ownership, planning, building regs, lack of knowledge of the house building process etc. act as a huge barrier to more people living like this. Changes to our approach to

housing away from large developments and towards small developments or individual houses, using local and natural materials, with standard designs available that meet building regs and simplify the process for interested parties could lead to wider spread benefits for society in mental well-being as well as reduced resource consumption and carbon emissions.

Not sure how you're feeding back to government and whether this fits in with their format but I'm hoping someone in power might just read it.

29/10/19