

# Climate friendly Leeds. A short report on the participatory workshop for members of the public and Leeds decision makers

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## Introduction

We ran an online workshop “*Climate friendly Leeds. A workshop for members of the public and Leeds decision makers*” on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The workshop drew on new evidence from a survey run as part of an ongoing research project into public views on climate change.<sup>1</sup>

In their accounts of public climate concern and high carbon activities many researchers and policy makers tell us that people’s attitudes and behaviours do not marry up, a pattern described as an attitude-behaviour gap. However, people often feel unable to act in ways which will have a wider impact. Their actions and behaviours, including how they care for others, heat their homes, interact with their family and friends and travel are not separable from the high carbon contexts in which they live. So, rather than see public inaction as puzzling we have asked in our research: *How do members of the public think about emissions, pollution and climate change in relation to their everyday activities? How do they perceive and reflect on the tensions which arise?*

In the first stage of our research, we carried out a survey in which we presented some vignettes, or storylines, of everyday climate-related dilemmas. We asked how a person faced with a particular dilemma should act and used open-ended questions to explore why respondents proposed this course of action. The method provided a wealth of insights into respondents’ reasoning. In designing our participatory workshop, we devised further research questions building on this data which asked:

- a. Are there common principles (for example, fairness, convenience or affordability) which influence people’s reasoning?
- b. How might such principles be used to inform climate-friendly policy and practices?
- c. How might the principles inform public engagement and communications strategies?

We ran the 3-hour workshop with support from Leeds City Council and Leeds Climate Commission. It brought together an invited group of 40 people including research participants, Leeds Climate Commissioners, Leeds City Council officers, local councillors, community and faith group representatives and other city stakeholders. This workshop model, we believe, offers an interesting avenue of public engagement as well as resources for decision makers. We gave a presentation to illustrate some of the survey findings (slides are available on the project website<sup>2</sup>) and we facilitated ‘breakout’ small group discussions with a focus on the questions posed above<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. Using experiences of everyday life to explore people’s principles for climate friendly policies

In the responses to the vignette storylines, we collected very extensive data showing survey respondents’ engagement with complexity and social contexts. For example, a vignette about a young woman’s decision about whether or not to fly on holiday with her friends revealed how people see individuals not as autonomous decision makers but as negotiating the best way to act based on their relationships, commitments and other constraints. Another vignette asked about if and how an employee should act on his frustration at his employer’s uncapped greenhouse gas emissions and a third considered a householder’s dilemma relating to recycling and waste. Respondents painted a

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<sup>1</sup> We have also run a series of semi-structured interviews with a subsample of survey respondents.

<sup>2</sup> <https://flag.leeds.ac.uk/research/public-views-and-the-climate-crisis-values-practices-and-policy-change/>

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Ian Sullivan for facilitating the 4<sup>th</sup> break out discussion group

picture of diverse individual commitments and responsibilities in explaining their responses, foregrounded the role of businesses, local and national government and provided nuanced accounts of the links, and disconnects, between individual actions and wider changes. We wanted to ask: *how might such nuance in public perceptions be mobilised in support of climate friendly policy and decision making?*

When faced with specific policy options, people often disagree on the best way forward. Furthermore, policies which are built on existing arrangements may end up fuelling unwanted outcomes (e.g. additional peak hour energy capacity or rush hour road capacity may simply reinforce the temporal problem they seek to solve). Drawing on the work of one of the team<sup>4</sup> we sought to explore the scope for identifying and working with principles which thread through public views on climate relevant policy and action. We used the following vignette from our survey questionnaire as a prompt to examine workshop participants' views about the best course of action and then explored themes across their responses:

*A local authority wants to tackle air pollution in the town centre and are consulting the public on different options. They aim to cut car traffic (but will keep access for disabled people and delivery drivers). Assuming that public transport is efficient and affordable, which of the following options would you support?*

1. *Pedestrianise all of the town centre, banning all non-essential cars*
2. *Charge private cars going into town at busy periods*
3. *Use a voluntary approach e.g. working with employers to encourage flexible working where possible (e.g. flexi time or home working) to reduce congestion*
4. *Other (you will be asked what)*

The purpose of this exercise was not to agree a course of action on air pollution or inform particular policy areas, rather it was to examine participants' reasoning, to explore the scope for eliciting what matters to people and to reflect on how this might be mobilised in climate relevant decision making. Participants gave varied responses to the vignette and discussed their reasoning. Several common themes about what mattered to people emerged from the discussions. People's sense of what matters can be specific to a problem or context so it may differ across transport, waste management, home energy use, diet and so on. Our list of principles is nevertheless interesting and illustrative of important themes which weave through participants' accounts of how to act on this policy example.

- ***Recognising complexity and interconnectedness of daily activities, policies and practices:*** Participants described and understood problems and solutions as complex; for example, they discussed ways in which interventions need to be designed to avoid pushing a problem elsewhere, or creating other unanticipated environmental or social impacts
- ***Focussing on the effectiveness of interventions, including their long term costs and benefits*** Participants highlighted the need to identify interventions that had the potential to reduce emissions most significantly, not just those that were most straightforward to implement. They called for a focus on interventions that would be most beneficial in the long-term, and emphasised the need to account for costs and benefits over the long-term.
- ***Improving safety:*** Safety was a matter of crucial importance in participants' daily lives. Participants agreed that feeling unsafe in the current system (such as lone women using public transport late at night) or new safety issues created by interventions (such as cycle lane design and maintenance issues) might act as a barrier to change.

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<sup>4</sup> Roelich and Litman Roventa (2021) Talking about infrastructure: eliciting public perceptions of infrastructure <https://maadm.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/123/2021/01/MAADM-Infrastructure-Report.pdf>

- ***Addressing fairness and enabling diverse voices:*** Participants were keen to ensure that services/ interventions are accessible for all groupings (e.g. relating to disability, ability to pay, being enabling for families) and do not detrimentally affect specific groups. There was discussion about whose voices are heard in public policy decision making, how conversations are framed (in ways which might make assumptions which fit some needs and not others) and ways to improve representation and engagement. This included different ways of consulting e.g. some participants had engaged in, and valued, city wide surveys and consultations, local level community consultations and councillor engagement with their wards and were keen to see more local level interactions. There was some discussion of whether public deliberation might slow down urgent action on climate or speed it along.
- ***Providing visible leadership and creating an enabling environment:***<sup>5</sup> Participants thought the authority should provide clear leadership, for example through a more profound redesign of infrastructure away from supporting cars to supporting public and active travel, and reducing the overall need to travel e.g. working with businesses to enable active travel and more flexible working. Participants thought that ‘enabling environments’ are crucial in order to provide viable alternatives to current behaviour and to change social norms, making sustainable behaviour the obvious choice.
- ***Recognising interconnected city geographies:*** Participants were concerned that a focus on one place could push a problem to another part of the city or could overlook more integrated responses to a problem. For example: there is potential to disperse economic activities from the city centre around the periphery, reducing city centre congestion but potentially also dispersing congestion and pollution around more residential areas.
- ***Developing a sense of place:*** Participants were keen to improve the experience of being in urban spaces and increasing pride and attachment to that place. They considered how urban design might contribute through, eg. 15-minute neighbourhoods, reducing the need to travel more generally, and increasing the quality and quantity of public space, including civic spaces in the city centre. There was also discussion about the importance of nature and of greening urban spaces which participants felt could further enhance pride and sense of place.
- ***Enabling radical ideas to match the sense of urgency:*** Participants were supportive of more radical interventions which they felt were more aligned with the urgency of addressing the climate crisis. There was discussion of the value of a graduated approach and experimentation, for example car free Sundays and free transport on specific busy arterial roads, potentially triggering wider buy-in and change.

There was a strong spatial narrative to the principles we outline here, linked to the inherently spatial problem of addressing transport in a city. It is likely that posing a different type of policy problem (for example, one relating to people’s relationships as in the storyline about a young woman’s decision about whether or not to fly abroad with her friends) would have led to participants articulating their reasoning in different ways. We do not see the principles as underpinning values which were held by our participants but rather as a description of what matters, framed here with reference to the given question about tackling air pollution. In the next ‘breakout’ small group discussions we asked if these principles, or descriptions of ‘what matters’, might inform policies and decision making in the eyes of participants.

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<sup>5</sup> Leeds City Council has undertaken extensive consultation relating to its policy areas <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/consultations-and-feedback> and relating more specifically to the Climate Emergency <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/plans-and-strategies/climate-change>

### 3. Principles in practice

In the second small group discussions, participants were asked to identify a specific intervention to address rush hour traffic congestion in the city. They were prompted to discuss how this intervention might be informed by the principles they had identified and how it might be justified and communicated. This helped provide a basis for exploring common concerns:

***Delivering on what matters:*** participants used the principles to evaluate how interventions addressed issues that mattered to them in their daily lives. For example, one suggested initiative involved establishing free public transport on a busy arterial route. The benefits met several principles through ***reducing congestion and pollution*** and ***fairness*** was addressed by providing free transport for all on the route. Health and well-being would be improved through reduced pollution and more active travel. Participants used the principles to refine initial proposals to deliver broader benefits, for example the creation of circular transport links was suggested to enhance ***convenience*** and a ***sense of place***, whilst bike storage and better-lit bus stops were suggested to aid ***safety*** and reinforce the ensuing downward spiral in car use. Disincentives to car use through charging was suggested to further increase the ***effectiveness*** of the intervention.

***How interconnected aspects of everyday life might inform interventions:*** participants' suggestions for interventions ranged from affordable (or free) public transport, to increased working from home, to supporting parents to reduce car travel to school. There was discussion about how principles might inform policies, for example safety concerns might mean having conductors on buses or allowing passengers to hail buses between stops. Often participants valued a holistic approach to tackle interlocking complexities. For example, more 'work from home' could reduce congestion and pollution through lowering the aggregate need for travel but policies also need to consider issues of well being, fairness and employer responsibilities vis-à-vis employees.

***Framing communication:*** Participants thought that communications should draw on shared concerns, build on a sense of collective endeavour and on the wide conviction of a need to act as part of a collectivity in tackling climate change. Participants advocated for the use of 'we' rather than 'you' and for 'pats on the back' rather than 'wagging of fingers' in communications with the public. They also suggested that communications about interventions could demonstrate how they improve daily lives rather than just describing the environmental and economic benefits.

### 4. Summary

Simple behavioural interventions push for changes in individuals' habits. They do not tend to recognise the complexity of everyday living or the ways in which people are 'locked in' to ways of doing things. Drawing on our survey research, we wanted to ask: *it is possible to better mobilise the very significant public appetite for urgent action on climate? How might the nuance with which people see complexity feed into the design of altered, climate friendly, contexts of everyday living?* The workshop took a specific (transport related) example to frame discussions. The aim was not to inform specific policy areas but, rather, to examine how citizens describe what matters in their daily lives and to explore how this might influence interventions and inform effective communications across citizens and decision makers. The approach offers insights of value for the design of interventions and for linked engagement and communications strategies. It also shines light on possibilities for more effectively mobilising very extensive public climate concern through bolder policy actions towards more climate friendly ways of living.