ADEPT

Association of Directors of
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

AN INTRODUCTION TO TALKING CLIMATE

March 2026

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This guide suggests practical approaches to communicating about climate and nature in ways that resonate with people's everyday lives. It has been produced by ADEPT, together with Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission, and is designed to inform broad, general communication, while also recognising that messages need to be tailored to specific audiences.

The guide draws substantially on insights and evidence from the Britain Talks Climate and Nature 2025 Communications Toolkit from Climate Outreach, an up-to-date, in-depth analysis of how Britons feel and think about climate and nature. The toolkit is based on extensive quantitative and qualitative research, surveying over 7,000 people and using focus groups to draw out strategic implications for policy and communication.

We have also used other sources and inspiration from professional communicators and organisations specialising in climate change communication, which are signposted at the end.

It is designed to be a reference tool and a strategic resource for effective, evidence-based communication. It can be read sequentially to build an understanding of the principles, or specific sections can be accessed when required, when preparing particular communications. The quick guide table offers at-a-glance alternatives to common terminology.

The guide is intended for use by local authority place teams, but we hope it will prove useful to anyone engaged in strategic climate communications. While the guide focuses primarily on public-facing communication, the principles equally apply to internal communications, engagement with stakeholders, and communications within professional networks. Consider your specific audience when applying the guidance: a message for residents may need different framing than one for local authority staff, business leaders, or community organisations, even when discussing the same topic.

Climate communication is evolving rapidly in response to public attitudes, political context, and best practice, so this guide will be adaptable over time and should be reviewed and updated regularly to remain relevant. It is a starting point for busy communicators, and we urge you to take a deeper dive into the reference materials it is based it on.

While much of the guidance is informed by a national survey of Britons' values, local context - including political dynamics and local priorities - is important and should inform your thinking when shaping communications. These tips are here to guide you, but you know your audience and local circumstances best.

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YORKSHIRE & HUMBER CLIMATE COMMISSION

THE BIG PICTURE

> **" People really do care about climate change more than you think. But if we don't up our game, we risk losing them. "**

"People really do care about climate change more than you think. But if we don't up our game, we risk losing them." This is a key takeaway from the Britain Talks Climate and Nature 2025 research and it pulls no punches. Climate action has an image problem, it says - but it's fixable.

A key issue underpinning Britain Talks Climate and Nature research is that trust in British society, politics and government is collapsing. "People feel overlooked, disillusioned about the present and fearful for the future, and many are yet to be convinced that net zero offers a positive way forward," it says. This is something that those working in local and combined authorities, as well as others in place-based climate governance, are already contending with.

The good news, the research shows, is that we are a nation of nature lovers and we want to protect our environment. "People from all walks of life care more deeply than many realise. We're extremely proud of the ways we protect and enjoy our environment, from national parks and woodlands, to wind farms and recycling."

According to polling from September 2025 by More in Common and Cimate Outreach, 74% of the more than 7,000 surveyed feel the issue is important, and more than half are worried and uncertain about the world that young people and future generations will inherit.

The message for us as communicators is that people care about climate change and they are open to clear and well-framed communication about it, but we need to approach the conversation differently. Getting the framing right is therefore vital.

Climate communicators should also tailor messages to audiences. Britain Talks Climate and Nature 2025 is underpinned by More in Common's underlined seven British segments. This places people into seven audience groups based on their values, core beliefs and worldviews, and how they think about climate change and nature. Different messages and framings resonate differently with each group, so knowing what works best is important to understand.

For more detailed guidance, refer to the Britain Talks Climate and Nature 2025 toolkits covering Climate and Nature, Net Zero, Renewable Energy and Infrastructure, and Energy in the Home.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATORS

Translate and explain

Don't use technical and elite jargon: it's alienating and excludes people.

Likewise, statistics aren't trusted and should not be overused. Instead, explain why climate action and policies matter and what they mean for people's lives. For example, saying that a council or organisation has set a target to reach net zero by a specific date is meaningless to a lot of people, only engages specific groups, and is polarising for others.

Champion inclusive language

Language matters. The words we choose have the power to shape how people feel about themselves, and how they feel about others.

Inclusive language can help to shift attitudes and behaviours: it doesn't exclude, stereotype or discriminate, or propagate prejudice or bias. While inclusive language is continually evolving, it's important to do the research, embed inclusive principles into all communications, and listen and adapt to feedback.

Tips:

- Describing a vision of how things can be better and connecting it to the things people value (health, happiness, protecting nature, safer area, a sustainable future for our children) scores much more highly.

- Do support with evidence, but present it through tangible examples and stories rather than relying on statistics to do all the work.

- Consider the placement of underpinning evidence and data: panels, appendices and notes for editors (for press releases) provide other options for more detailed information.

Tips:

- Be specific and accurate, avoiding euphemisms, umbrella terms and figurative language.

- Identify the causes of injustice, acknowledging that inequality is created, not inevitable.

- Be careful with words and phrases that put the blame in the wrong place, including loaded language that can propagate harmful stereotypes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATORS

Inspire a better future

Alarming facts about climate change can be overwhelming and make people less likely to want to think or talk about it - especially when they have other and more immediate concerns, such as the cost-of-living crisis.

Communicators need to talk about how acting on climate change can improve our lives in other ways, keeping stories local, tangible and authentic. Focus primary messages on the benefits of climate action.

Tips:

- Connect tackling climate change with benefits people can see and feel like better public transport, cleaner air, greater fitness and healthier diets, alongside cutting bills, protecting nature and improving health and wellbeing.

- Highlight positive progress.

- Use a range of messengers who are credible, passionate and empathetic.

- Avoid focusing on rebutting false information or negative narratives - tell a better story instead.

- Respond to concerns about costs without reinforcing them - frame climate policy as an investment in a better future but avoid making sweeping claims.

Don't take support for granted

But don't overestimate the level of opposition or play into scaremongering.

A majority of people support climate action but wrongly assume others don't. This is called a perception gap. In reality, climate scepticism is far less common than people think: Britain Talks Climate and Nature found that UK residents underestimate others' concern about climate change by 20%.

Tips:

- Talk of net zero can prompt negative reactions from a minority, but be careful not to add to the perception gap around it in your own communications by implying opposition is greater than it is. (For more, check Climate Barometer's Perception Gaps tracker.)

- Don't use 'net zero' as shorthand: explain that reaching net zero emissions is scientifically necessary as the solution to tackling climate change and creating a better future.

- Do talk about the progress Britain has made on reducing emissions: we are halfway to the target and enjoying concrete benefits from cleaner air and warmer homes to good jobs and better health.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATORS

Talk about climate and nature

By understanding why people distance themselves from climate change we can tailor better communications.

Only 4% of those polled by More In Common and Climate Outreach denied that climate change is real. Britons who said they didn't think about it much gave reasons from it not coming up as a topic in their daily lives to feeling a lack of agency, depressed, and it being too complicated.

Of the top five worries about climate change, 'harm to nature and wildlife' was significantly the highest. The majority feel strongly or somewhat appreciative and respectful of nature and say being in nature makes them happy. They are also proud of the UK's work to protect and restore natural places - this extends from planting trees and reducing littering, to working with farmers on environmental solutions and building new wind farms and solar farms.

Tips:

- Generally, people don't use or understand terms like 'mitigation' or 'adaptation', though they do support them. Language around 'tackling climate change' or 'taking climate change seriously' resonates, so long as its explained and connected to tangible benefits, for example building better flood defences or making our homes more suited to heat.

- Nature doesn't exist as a standalone: climate impacts are a major contributor to species decline and the breakdown of ecosystems that we rely on (including for our national security). Show the link between the nature we love and want to protect and the effects of climate change - and how restoring nature is a crucial part of the solution.

Normalise enthusiasm for clean energy

People across the political spectrum are supportive and proud of the UK's move towards clean energy and support for renewables vastly outweighs opposition to them (only 15% don't like seeing wind turbines in the countryside).

Use stories of progress to underpin this.

Tips:

- Talk more about how clean energy is a good investment in a more secure and self-sufficient future for the UK and how continuing to transition to clean energy leads to good things for us all.

- Avoid trashing a valued part of our shared past or present - people recognise the need for transition from fossil fuels, but have a sense of pride in our industrial heritage.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATORS

Talk like a human

Use everyday language, vivid imagery and examples that connect to people's daily lives and experiences.

Tips:

- Messages that feature real people tend to resonate more strongly (and the same is true of visual imagery depicting people).

- People trust voices they know, so draw on local leaders, scientists, doctors, healthcare professionals, independent advice centres and farmers to deliver your message.

- Use appropriate language for your audience: 'climate crisis' works for those already alarmed, but reduces support from more conservative audiences (see **Quick guide**). Similarly, degrees of temperature rise can be interpreted by some as a good thing, so don't assume people will automatically understand the implications for global heating.

- Avoid partisanship: language that links to politics has negative connotations for different audiences/segments. Don't add 'climate' or 'green' before words - it sounds like a political agenda.

- But don't avoid talking about climate change! Link messages with a felt consequence within five words (eg 'Climate change is causing extreme fires').

- Talk about 'kitchen table' issues that people are concerned about day to day (health, energy security, jobs, food, bills, pollution, community) and link to pro-environmental solutions.

Keep it local - and celebrate successes

Framing issues at a local level works better than abstract references to 'the planet'.

Tips:

- Demonstrate action with concrete examples, especially local ones, for example making buildings more energy efficient, switching to electric vehicles, and changes to procurement.

- Normalise environmental action by showing the diverse range of ordinary people engaged in these efforts.

- Pride in progress and place is one of the most effective frames we have: show what tackling climate change and protecting nature looks like in practice and talk about the progress we've already made. Highlight action under way in communities, by councils, groups, and inspiring individuals, and connect policy to tangible improvements people can see and feel. A good example includes community energy projects, where local people generate and profit from renewable energy.

- Celebrating wins for people and nature provides a broad general frame for communicators to work with. However, local authorities' communications need to be sensitive to local political dynamics and local political control. Communicators should be aware of these and mindful of implications for specific contexts.

- If addressing national or global issues, focus on success stories we can be proud of: for example, the UK is a world leader in technologies that reduce climate-warming gases, and the energy transition is attracting huge investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATORS

Address challenges honestly

Acknowledge legitimate concerns about costs and change.

Tips:

- Frame the message clearly, e.g. 'transition has costs, but inaction costs far more.'

- Emphasise that action is inevitable and protective; turning back is harder than moving forward. Provide clear information on available support and show government leadership through practical examples, like energy-efficient buildings and electric fleets.

- While we need to be honest about the trade-offs, avoid language that focuses on limitations or sacrifices. Instead, emphasise solutions that protect people and nature from harm and pollution, rather than forcing lifestyle changes.

Dealing with misinformation

Misinformation is fake news that is spread by mistake; disinformation is fake news that is spread intentionally by someone who knows it is fake. If you can, publish fact checks and brief journalists, but avoid getting drawn into endless rebuttals, especially on social media.

Tips:

- Establish a positive counter-narrative by proactively demonstrating benefits, rather than reacting to misinformation with statistics or 'myth-busting'. Prevention is better than cure, so use 'pre-bunking' - getting accurate information out and inoculating against misinformation, sources and tactics before they strike and can be spread.

- Highlight what people risk losing without action: affordable bills, good jobs fit for the future, and energy security (reliable access to energy generated in the UK without depending too heavily on imports).

- Connect responses to values like pride in British and local leadership and innovation.

- Don't defend the transition with statistics alone; instead, paint a picture of the better future we are creating: cleaner air, warmer homes, good jobs, and thriving nature.

- Shift the focus from abstract problems to tangible accountability: polluters, dirty energy and costs imposed on people.

QUICK GUIDE

Common climate language terms and some preferred ways of talking about climate action. This is complementary to the guidance and tips above and should be used in accordance with your local/specific context and issue.

Common terms	Preferred way of talking about climate action
Biodiversity loss	Losing nature, damage to nature, protecting nature and wildlife.
Carbon footprint	Carbon emissions
Carbon neutral	Largely used by corporates, has fallen out of favour due to greenwashing. Use 'Net Zero' (but see opposite)
Circular economy	Less waste, more re-use & recycling, cutting costs, better use of resources.
Climate change	'Climate crisis' will work for an informed and concerned audiences; for general communications consider using 'changing climate' or 'global heating' when couched in wider communications linking to climate impacts felt in your place, community, or issue.
Climate resilience	Planning for, better protecting against, and responding to and recovering from extreme weather events; strengthening community responses.
Climate adaptation	Taking action to prepare and protect our communities and organisations from extreme weather.
Decarbonisation	Moving to clean, more secure energy.
Nature-based solutions	Working with nature to deliver solutions.
Emissions	Use this term, but be specific to the context: e.g. transport emissions, air pollution, industrial emissions.

Common terms	Preferred way of talking about climate action
Environmental protection	Looking after people and the environment, protecting the natural world.
Green investment	Investment in clean, low carbon industries / clean, low carbon economy / clean, low carbon future.
Green jobs	Jobs (if the context demands specificity around sectors / industries, feel free to name to the innovation and skills you're promoting).
Hard to reach, hard to engage	This term, which is often used as a descriptor for marginalised communities, subtly shifts blame onto those groups or individuals. It implies that they are the problem, rather than the economic and political decisions that have systematically excluded them. Instead, consider using: hardly reached, under-estimated, seldom heard, under-served, easy to ignore
Net zero	Don't use it in isolation or as shorthand; it's a technical term and and isn't well understood. Put it in context and always explain it as a solution for reducing further climate change and link to practical actions.
Renewable energy	This term is widely understood, but you can also use clean power, clean home-grown energy, energy independence, energy security.
Sustainability	The term is coming back into common parlance - go for it! The term acknowledges what everyone can agree on: that we need to conserve natural resources and protect global ecosystems to support health and wellbeing, now and in the future.

SOURCES AND FURTHER INSPIRATION

• Britain Talks Climate and Nature 2025 Research and Toolkits - https://climateoutreach.org/btc/2025/report/

• Potential Energy Coalition: Talk Like a Human - US non-profit organisation, set up to shift the narrative about climate change - https://potentialenergycoalition.org/downloads/Talk-Like-a-Human.pdf

• Roger Harrabin's written evidence for the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee September 2025 - https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/148038/pdf/

• Climate Outreach - Communications Toolkit

• The Institute of Actuaries Report - https://actuaries.org.uk/planetary-solvency

• Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit - https://eciu.net

• Inclusive language - https://fightingtalk.uk

• Making sense of what people think about climate change (especially net zero) - https://climatebarometer.org/

• Larger Us - works with organisations to support their members to have climate conversations - https://larger.us/

• Climate Emergency UK - aims to empower those advocating for change both within and outside councils - https://climateemergency.uk/

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The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) is the voice of local authority place directors and their teams.

Our members manage vital local services - from highways, waste, recycling and planning - while also preparing for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

ADEPT is a membership based, voluntary organisation with members across England. We bring together directors from county, unitary, metropolitan and combined authorities, along with sub-national transport bodies and corporate partners.

Collectively, our members provide services for more than 42 million people, manage 164,000 miles of road and handle around 75% of all recycled waste in England.

ADEPT members develop long term strategies, investment and infrastructure needed to make their places resilient, sustainable, inclusive and prosperous. They drive clean, sustainable growth, delivering the projects that are fundamental to creating more resilient communities, economies and infrastructure. These services include housing, environmental and regulatory services, planning, economic development, culture and highways and transport.

For more information on ADEPT please click here to visit the website -
www.adeptnet.org.uk

YORKSHIRE & HUMBER CLIMATE COMMISSION

Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission is an independent advisory body that supports, facilitates and enables ambitious climate action across the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Established in March 2021, it is the largest regional climate commission in the UK and brings together climate leaders from across the public, private and third sectors.

More than 150 people are involved in the Commission's work, including a core team based at the University of Leeds. It has a chair, four political vice chairs from around the region, and connects local authorities in Yorkshire and Humber through a policy forum and a separate group on accelerating adaptive action. The Commission works collaboratively with other partners through flagship projects on climate and health, energy, modal shift, skills, enabling investment, and land and water, as well as through four core groups, and has over 100 signatories to its Climate Action Pledge from businesses and organisations.

The Commission has four interconnected pillars of action: rapid emissions reduction, climate adaptation and resilience, nature restoration, and a just transition. These are set out in a co-created Climate Action Plan for Yorkshire and the Humber, a strategic framework for positive action with 60 actions set out across seven themes, designed to inform and guide action and to provide support for investment.

Find out more about our work - www.yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk

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