CLIMATE OUTREACH

Equipping rural councillors to engage effectively on climate change

Photo credit: Rob Arnold/ Alamy

Overview

- What we know about rural attitudes to climate change

- Do's and don'ts for communicating climate change to rural citizens

- Rural 'Britain Talks Climate'

- Next steps

Rural attitudes to climate change

Photo credit: Ian Lamond/ Alamy

% worried about climate change

Rural Conservative supporters

80%

Rural Labour supporters

95%

Rural Liberal Democrat supporters

96%

Rural citizens are worried about environmental issues

Rural citizens are worried about environmental issues

Universal high concern regarding

→ The natural environment (92%)

→ Plastic pollution (91%)

→ Deforestation (93%)

→ Air pollution (90%)

Climate change is a topic of high concern to rural citizens (**87%**) across the political spectrum

(Based on survey results from Britain Talks Climate, 2020. "Rural" label based based on Rural Urban Classification system of postcodes from the UK Office for National Statistics)

Photo credit: Tony Farrugia / Alamy

Rural citizens are more engaged than urban

- 60% of rural citizens think that we are already feeling the effects of climate change (56% urban)
- Rural citizens have high civic and political participation
  - 64% donated to charity (54% urban)
  - 54% voted in local elections (50% urban)
  - 45% have signed a petition (39% urban)
  - 22% volunteered in their local community (15% urban)

More likely to say their **ideal UK** is **hard-working** and **environmentally-friendly**, compared to urban citizens

- 85% agree that "too much in our country is decided in London"
- 50% say "the area where I live has been neglected for a long time"

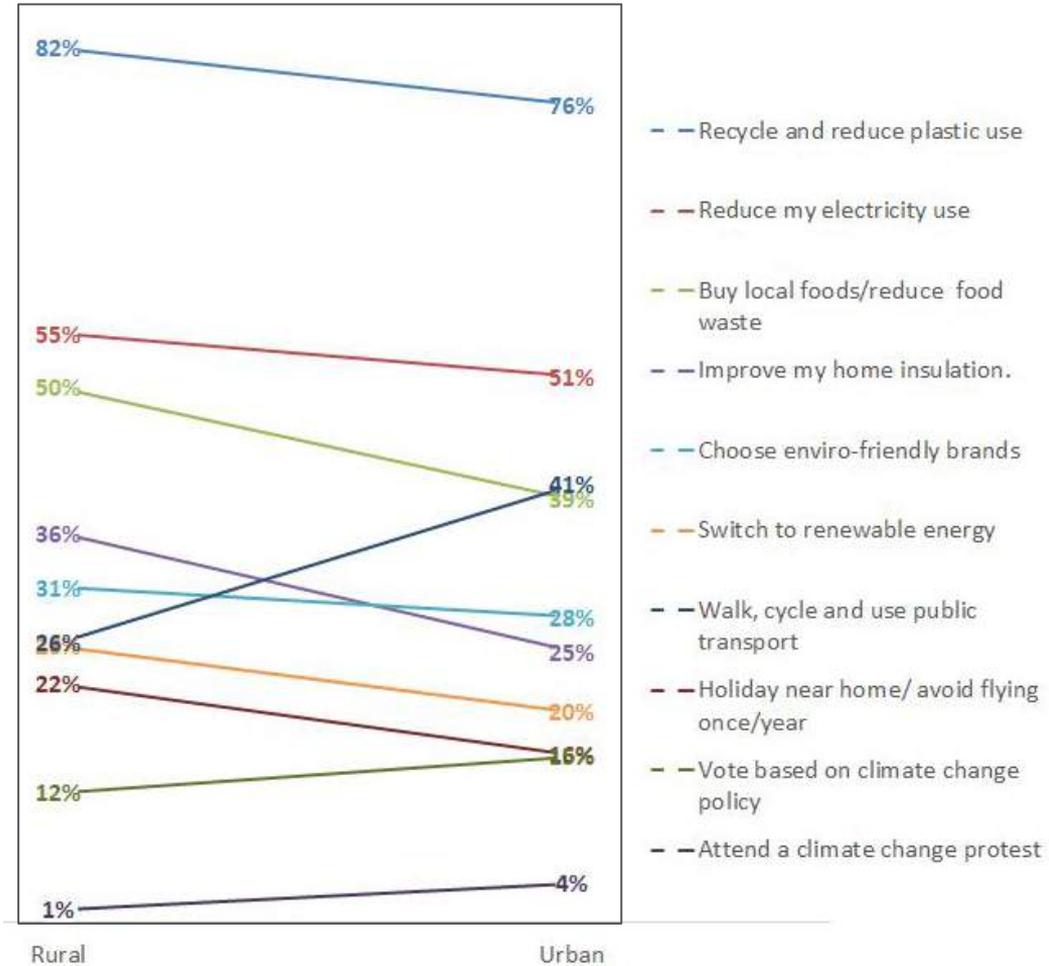*(Based on survey results from Britain Talks Climate, 2020)*

Behaviours

Compared to those in urban areas, **rural citizens are more likely to** engage in a range of personal actions to reduce their climate impact

- Recycle, reuse plastic
- Reduce electricity use
- Buy local food
- Improv home insulation
- Switch to renewable energy
- Holiday near home

They are less likely to

- Walk, cycle, and use public transport
- Vote for a political party based on their climate policies
- Attend a climate change protest

*Based on survey results from Britain Talks Climate (2020)*

Chart (Rural → Urban):
- Recycle and reduce plastic use: 82% → 76%
- Reduce my electricity use: 55% → 51%
- Buy local foods/reduce food waste: 50% → 39%
- Improve my home insulation.: 36% → 25%
- Choose enviro-friendly brands: 31% → 28%
- Switch to renewable energy: 26% → 20%
- Walk, cycle and use public transport: 26% → 41%
- Holiday near home/ avoid flying once/year: 22% → 16%
- Vote based on climate change policy: 12% → 16%
- Attend a climate change protest: 1% → 4%

Rural   Urban

Policy support

Compared to those in urban areas, rural citizens **are** more likely to support several climate policies

- Food waste targets for supermarkets
- Fining brands for excess packaging
- Taxing frequent flyers

They are less likely to support

- Banning petrol and diesel cars by 2030

Based on survey results from Britain Talks Climate (2020)
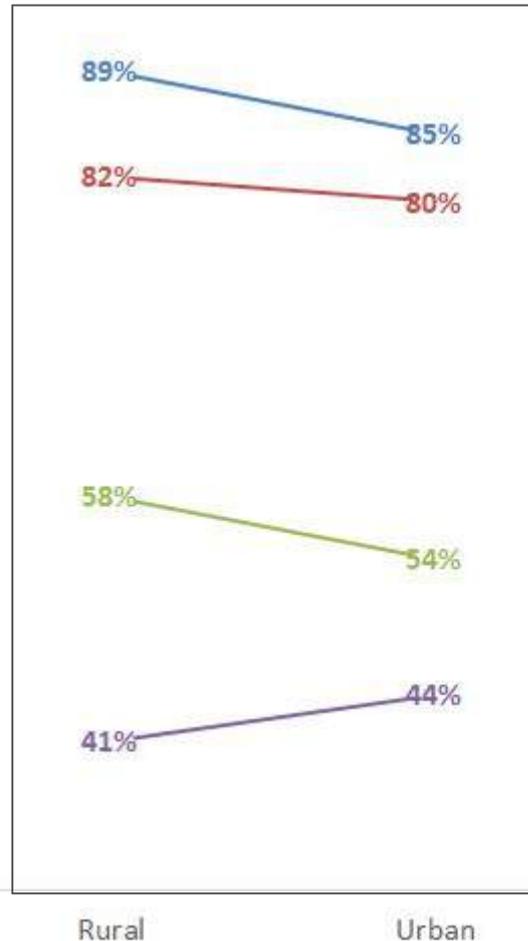
89% → 85% — Set targets for supermarkets to reduce food waste.

82% → 80% — Fine brands that use excessive or difficult to recycle plastic packaging.

58% → 54% — Tax people who fly the most.

41% → 44% — Ban all new petrol and diesel cars by 2030.

Rural   Urban

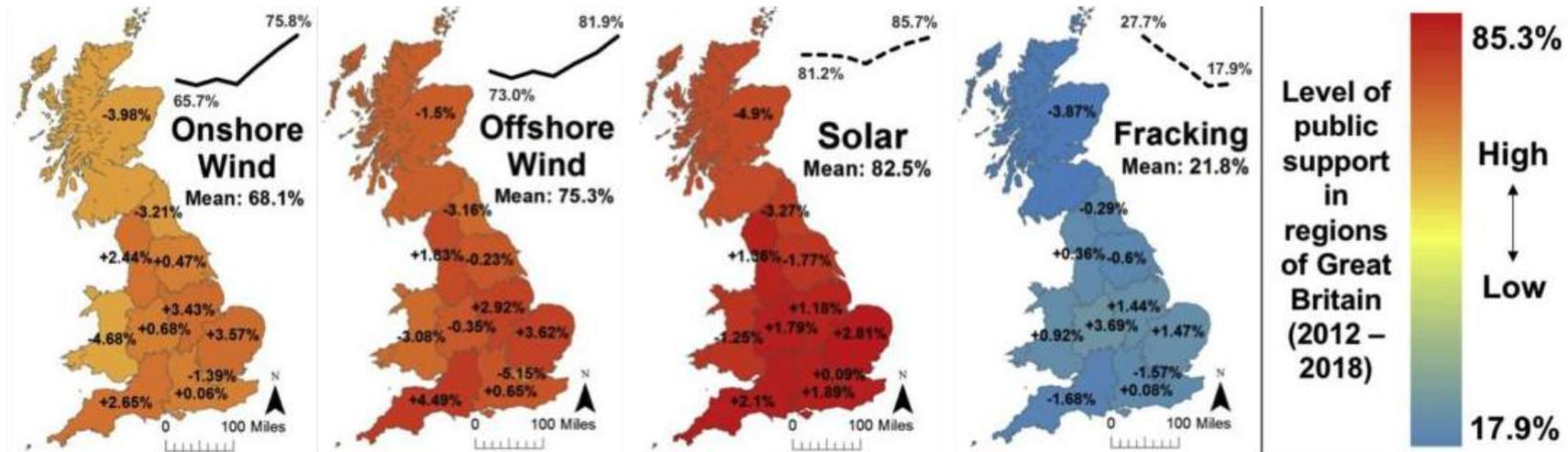Photo credit: Wayne Hutchinson/ Alamy

Petrol and diesel cars

→ 45% of rural citizens are *very or somewhat worried* that tackling climate change means they **won't be able to drive their petrol or diesel car** (29% urban)

  → Some see bans as unfair because the government previously encouraged people to buy diesel (61%)

  → Some are concerned about extra costs to daily life (55%)

(Based on survey results from Britain Talks Climate, 2020)

Attitudes to new forms of energy

- Based on 6 waves of data from the UK Government's Energy and Climate Change Public Attitudes Tracker between 2012 and 2018 (each wave with ~2100 responses)

- Support for renewables is high across the country, and increasing over time. Much higher than for alternatives such as fracking, which is decreasing.

- There is little regional variation

- Conservatism is not associated with lower support for renewable energy

Image from: Roddis, Carver, Dallimer & Ziv (2019). Accounting for taste? Analysing diverging public support for energy sources in Great Britain. *Energy Research and Social Sciences*, 56, 10.1016/j.erss.2019.101226.

Support for renewables is higher in rural areas

→ Support for **renewable energy (in general)**, biomass, wave/tidal and solar was found to be **higher in rural areas**

→ 75% of rural citizens think that **cutting carbon emissions is an opportunity to create new jobs** in the UK

→ Support for high-carbon industries such as fracking is **decreasing every year,** most of all in areas with **high employment in oil and gas.** People **do not want more high-carbon industries**

(Roddis et al., 2019; Britain Talks Climate, 2020)

Do's and don'ts

Principles with general appeal for rural audiences, rather than speaking to one particular position or political bias

1 Local identity, local leadership

✓

Link to local identity and local leadership.
Rural & regional communities seek
strong local leadership on climate action,
representing local interests, built on an
understanding of the issues particular to
their village or area

✗

**Avoid simply echoing top-down
messages.** Rural citizens may resent
initiatives if they appear to be delivered
top down, and be sceptical of centralised
climate policies, fearing that they may
hurt small local businesses.

Photo credit: Jeff Morgan/ Alamy

2 Trusted communicators

✓

Place local people at the centre of communication. Actively seek out communicators who are seen to be representative of the local population (with a rural heritage, diversity of income)

✗

Avoid being overly dependent on communicators who are incomers, have higher education, or do not have strong roots in the area. Ensure that communicators are balanced by representation of local people
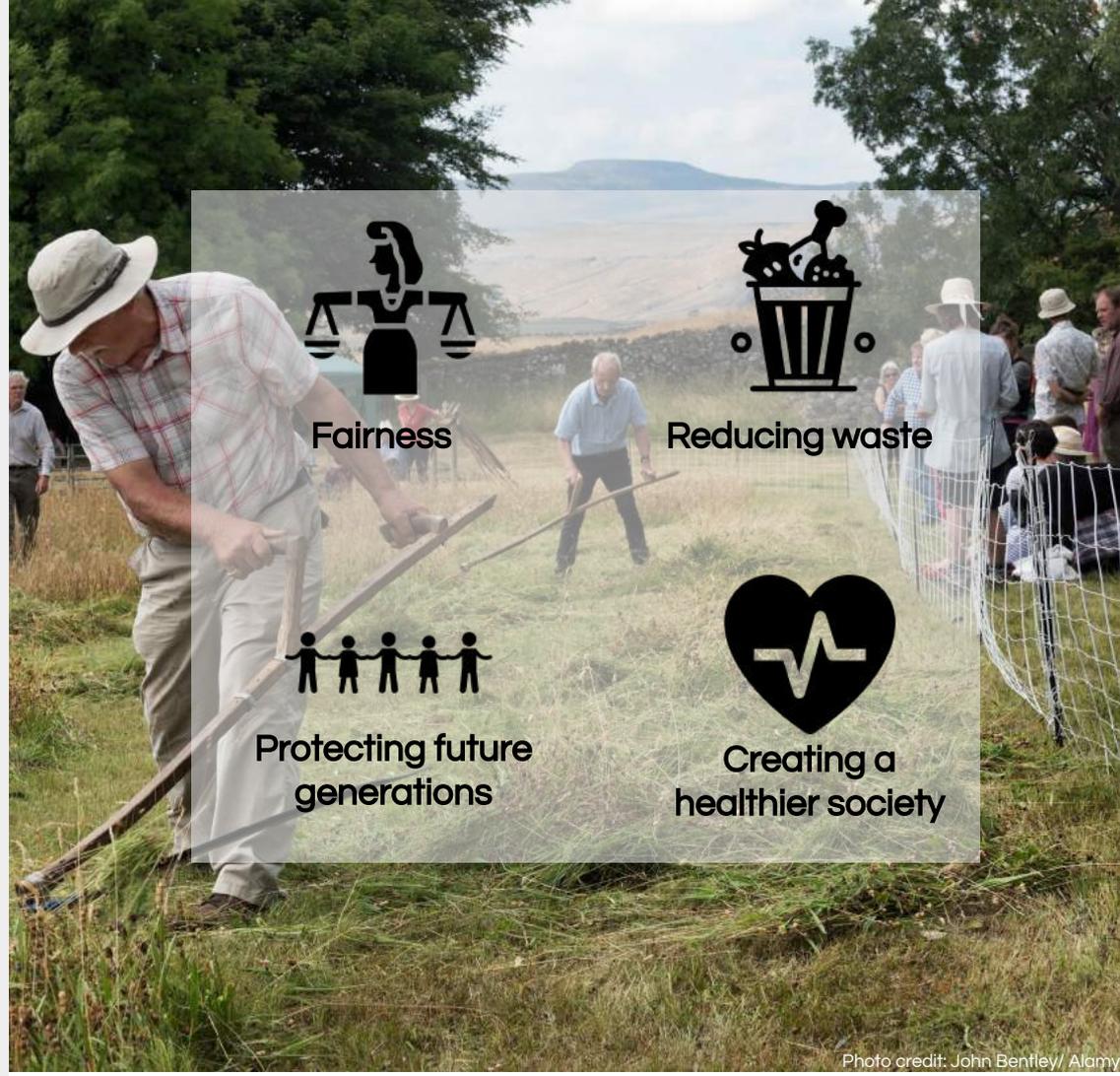
Photo credit: Keith Morris/ Alamy

3 The role of values

✓ Lead with values that have appeal **across the political spectrum** so that no groups feel alienated or not part of the solution.

✗ **Avoid language often used by environmental activists** about "climate justice", "saving the planet" and "radical" change.

Fairness

Reducing waste

Protecting future generations

Creating a healthier society

Photo credit: John Bentley/ Alamy

4 Impacts and adaptation

Build in positive stories of local responses to extreme weather events and changes as proof of local resilience. Ground messages in local values of self reliance and how people pull together

Recognise but don't overplay the negative impacts of previous and future extreme weather. People are often unwilling to face up to past trauma this can be seen as exploitative

Photo credit: Alan Smith/ Alamy

5

The place of climate change in messaging

✓

Lead with a recognition of the efforts people are already making in their lives to reduce their impact on the climate.

✕

Don't assume people don't care, aren't worried, are not willing and ready to do more.

Photo credit: Ian Dyball/ Alamy

6 Promoting agency and optimism

✓

Instead of emphasising what not to do, talk about what people can do more of. Talk about positive and optimistic messages in a context of inevitability of change, the change already being under way.

✕

Avoid fatalism, while recognising the scale of the challenges ahead. There may be resistance against messaging that is entirely negative, seeing it as alarmist

Photo credit: Thousand Word Media/ Alamy

7 Using symbols of local and national pride

✓

Use positive messages, national and local pride. Supporting local industries and British agriculture is seen as a symbol of national pride. Rural citizens have a stronger connection with the British countryside than urban citizens.

✗

Avoid potentially divisive, polarising issues/culture war topics, e.g., rewilding.

Photo credit: Cultura Creative/ Alamy

8 Using effective imagery

✓

Use visual communication that illustrates these principles: Show people working, prioritise diversity of income and ensure strong representation of people with rural ways of life.

✗

Avoid images without people, that objectify the buildings and the landscape. Avoid elitist, incomer, or picture postcards images of the country as a Museum or an environment solely for nature.

Photo credit: Patricia Weston/Alamy

8 Duty and shared responsibility

Represent the environment as something we have a duty to protect. Stewardship, trusteeship and a shared responsibility to conserve and protect the natural environment are all embedded deeply at the heart of traditional conservatism

But avoid telling people how they should act. People respond negatively to perceived top-down messages about actions that people should and shouldn't take.

Words to use:
Duty, tradition, integrity
Defend, secure, safe
Restore, rebuild, repair, renew
Beautiful, pure, pollution, dirty, mess

Photo credit: Image Source/Alamy

9

Communicating goals and targets

Talk about policies in terms of their pragmatism, responding flexibly and addressing to problems sensibly.

Don't over promise or offer unreasonable targets. Use interim targets, we get to net zero by 2050 by phasing out diesel and petrol cars by 2030.
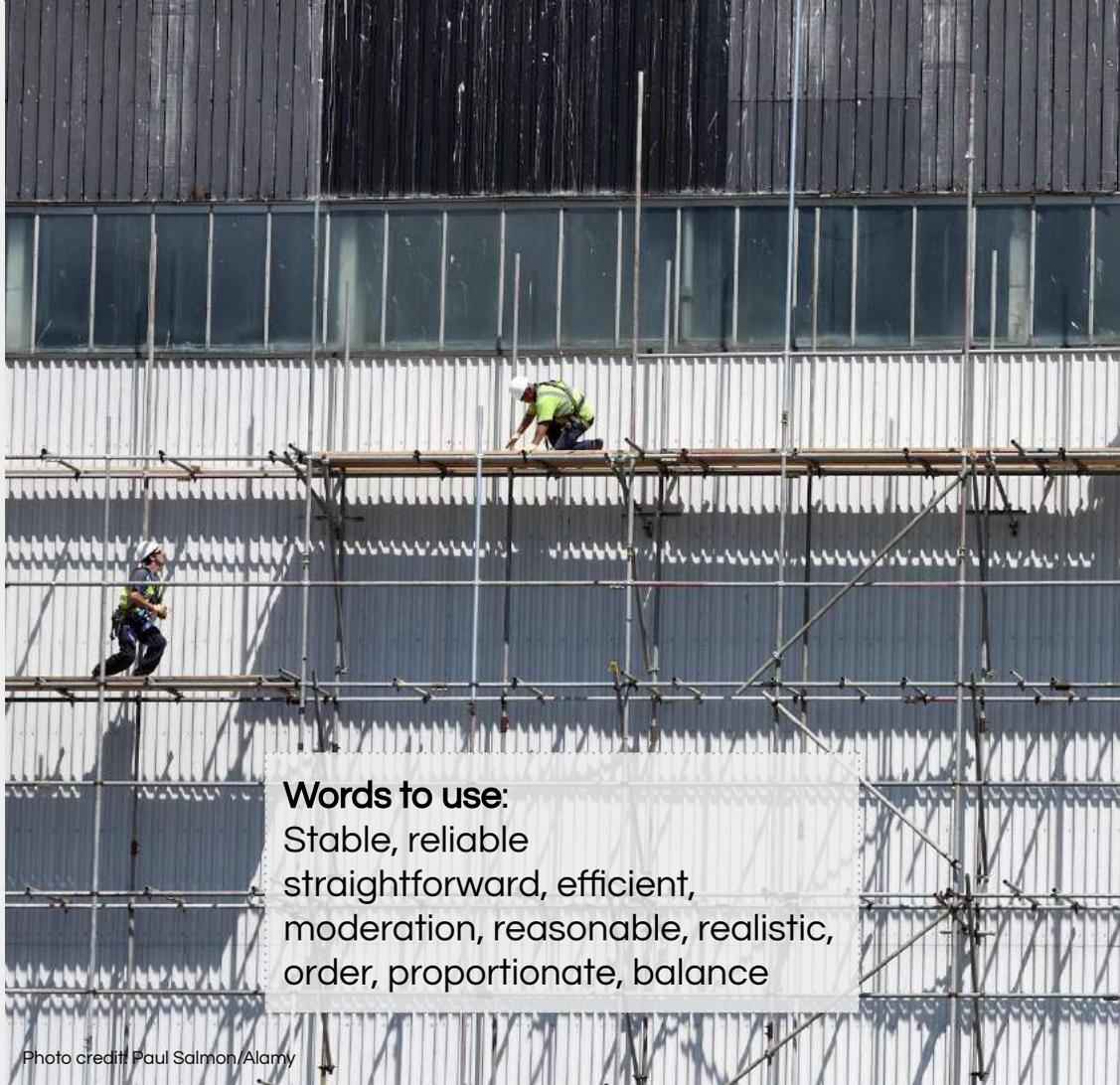
Words to use:
Stable, reliable straightforward, efficient, moderation, reasonable, realistic, order, proportionate, balance

Photo credit: Paul Salmon/Alamy

10 Change and continuity

Talk about continuity, about how changes help to maintain security and preserve what people value. Stress continuity between the past and the future, and drawing on past experience

Avoid language that suggests radical overhaul, as some see radical change as instability. While changes in the weather *will* be something new, our responses are part of a long story of steady and intelligent responses to new and changing situations.

Photo credit: Cavcan Images/Alamy

Rural Britain Talks Climate

Specific segmented guidance for rural Great Britain

Photo credit: Ken Biggs / Alamy

Why Britain Talks Climate?

A new approach for communicating climate change based on:

- Survey of 10,385 including England, Wales, and Scotland, with 2 follow-up polls in May and September

- Used hierarchical cluster analysis to find 7 groups who have similar psychographic and behavioural patterns

- 10 focus groups + 35 interviews

The research goes beyond simple accounts of public opinion (left vs right, leave vs remain) to go deeper on issues that include climate, politics, gender and race, but also community, safety and progress.

Britain Talks Climate

Progressive Activists: politically active, vocal, focused on climate

**Backbone Conservatives**: patriotic, proud, food, farming & rural life

Civic Pragmatists: moderate, politically demotivated, but sustainable at home

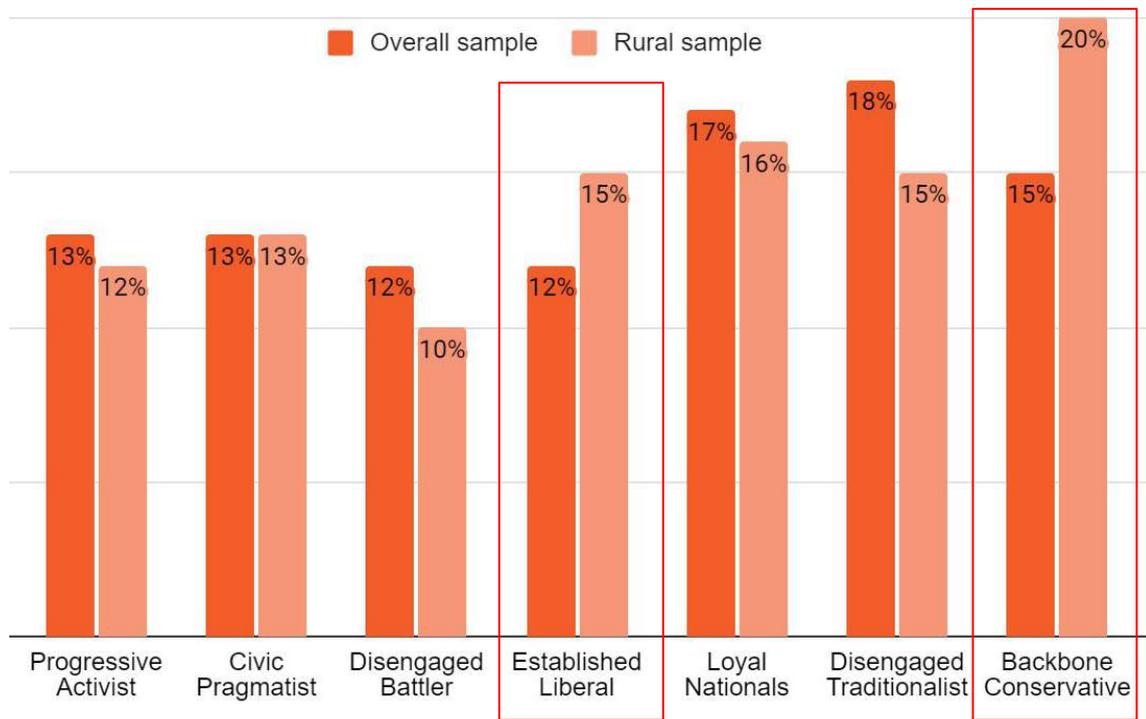**Established Liberals:** optimistic, empowered, low-carbon solutions & growth

Disengaged Battlers: unheard, frustrated by middle class environmentalism

Disengaged Traditionalists: alienated, sceptical, least engaged on climate

Loyal Nationals: patriotic, threatened, concerned about localised inequality
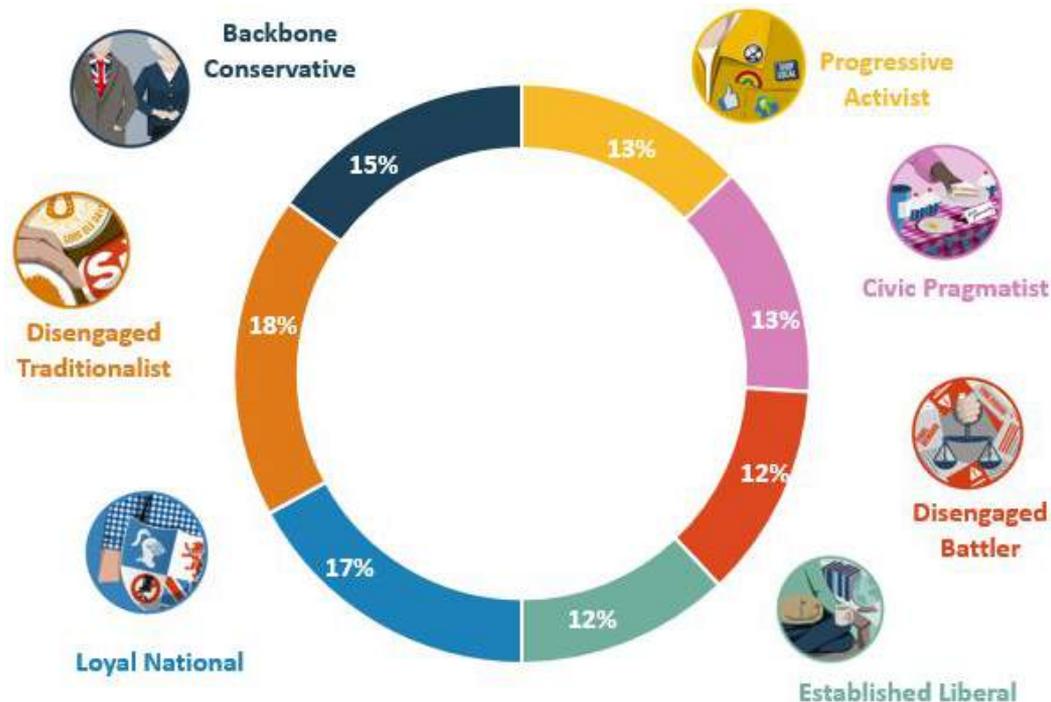
Britain Talks Climate: Rural

The seven segments of Britain Talks Climate are all represented in rural* areas.

There are proportionally more Backbone Conservatives, more Established Liberals, and fewer Disengaged Battlers and Disengaged Traditionalists.

- More **higher-income Conservative party** voters

- **Fewer lower-income** voters, **"Red Wall" voters**, and **Labour voters**

- Fewer "non-voter" populations

"Rural" label based based on Rural Urban Classification system of postcodes from the UK Office for National Statistics

Backbone Conservatives

Environmentalism distinct from the left

Voting: 63% Conservative, 6% Labour, 3% Liberal Democrats

Focus on issues they care about: farming, rural way of life, British leadership on env standards

Change the messenger. Scientists, farmers, representatives of rural life and people impacted by climate change are more trusted

National pride in practical achievements, not grandiose rhetoric
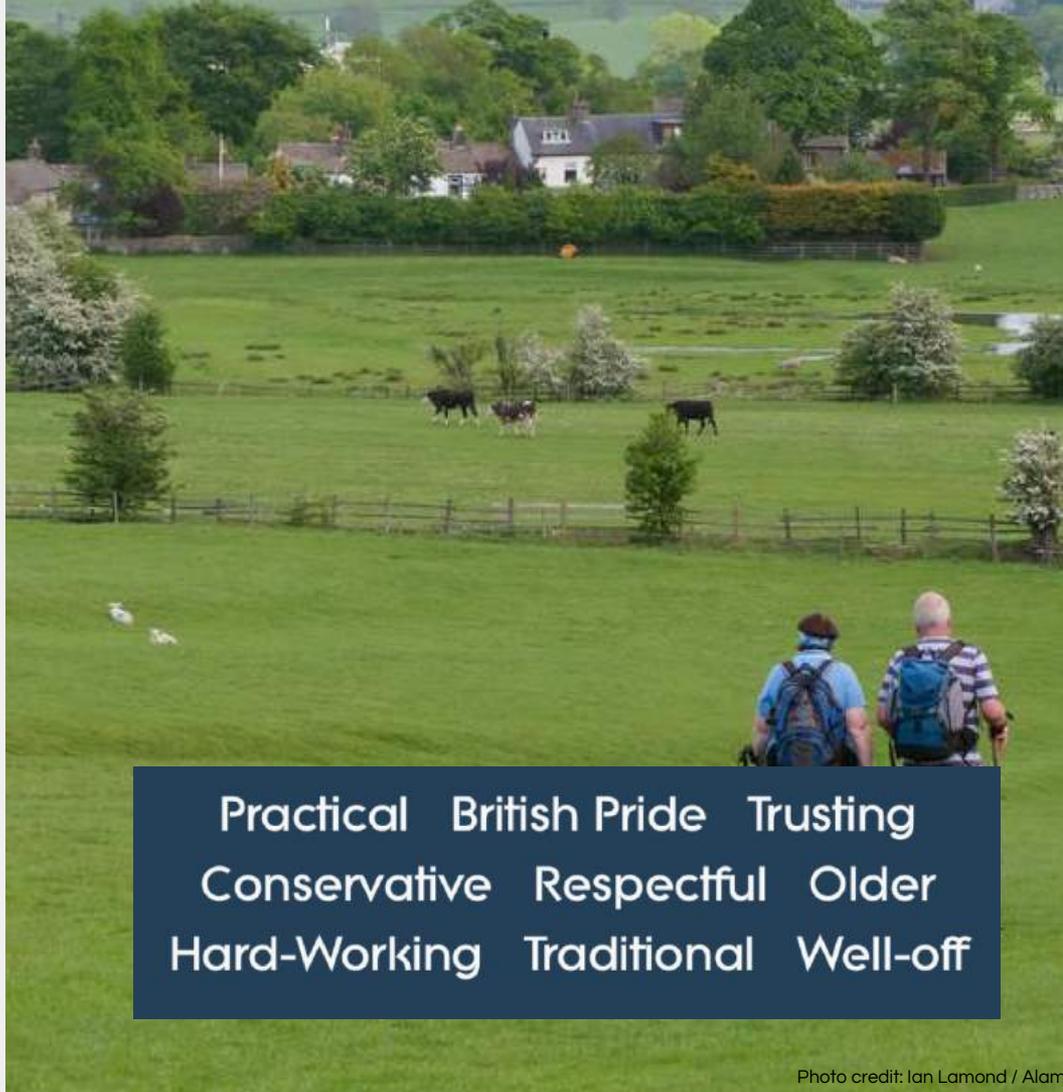
Practical   British Pride   Trusting
Conservative   Respectful   Older
Hard-Working   Traditional   Well-off

Established Liberals

Common sense, low carbon solutions

Voting: 35% Conservative, 15% Labour, 11% Liberal Democrats

Tell an **authentically positive story**: how things can **continue to improve**

The **rational economics** of climate policies - the green recovery as as **sensible return on investment**

Build a coalition around **food & farming**. Established Liberals recognise the responsibility for creating a cleaner, safer natural environment

Content   Global   High-Earning
Moderate   Right-Leaning   Trusting
Compromising   Optimistic   Comfortable

Photo credit: David Gee / Alamy
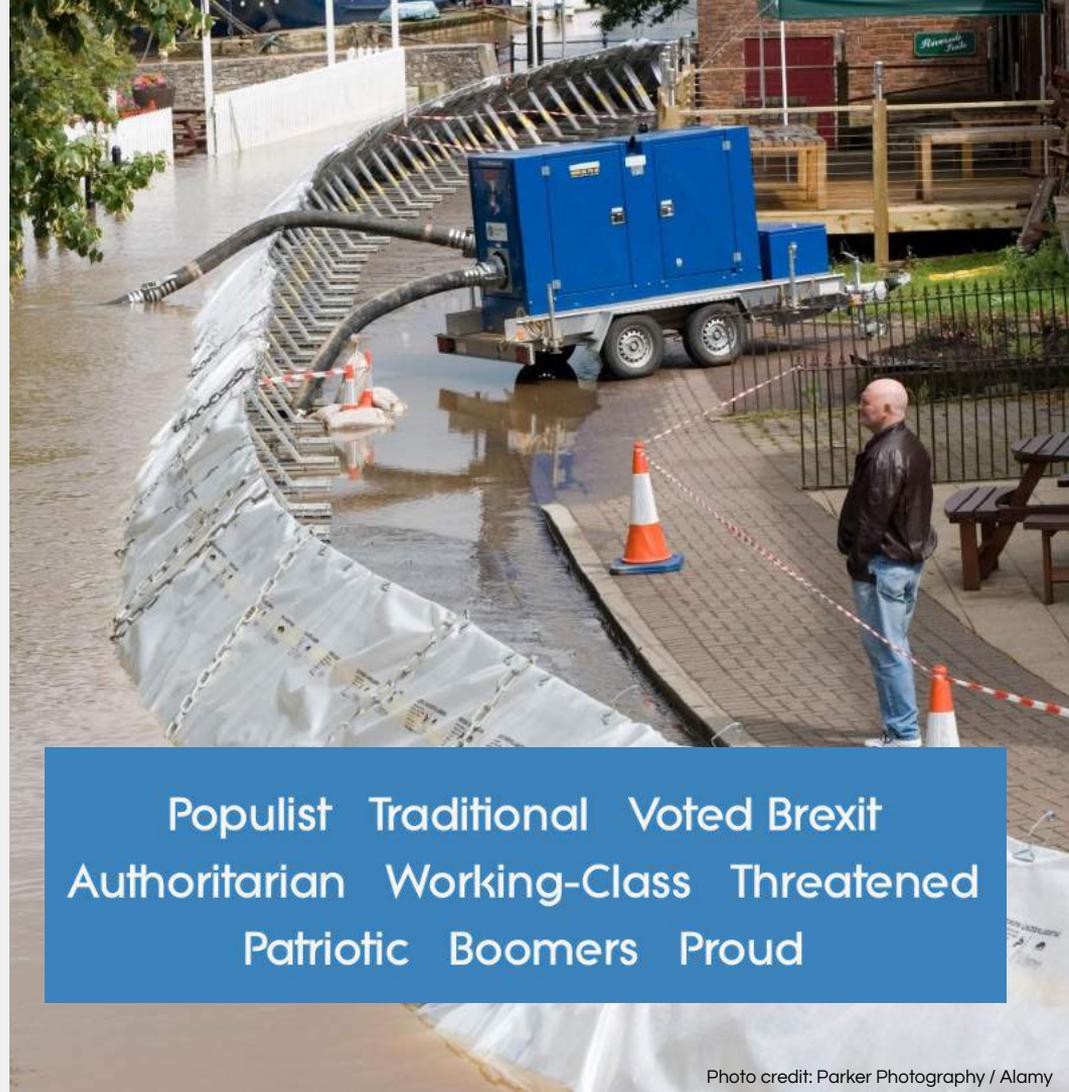
Loyal Nationals

Engage on the 'local' level

Voting: 34% Conservative, 19% Labour, 4% Liberal Democrats

Localised focus: cleaning up 'neglected' areas, localised inequality

Highlight shared experiences (common currency) of heatwaves, floods & storms - give space to the **trusted voices of those impacted by climate change**

Call out big polluters, **who must play by the rules**

Populist Traditional Voted Brexit
Authoritarian Working-Class Threatened
Patriotic Boomers Proud

Photo credit: Parker Photography / Alamy

Recommendations & Conclusions

Photo credit: Kenny Ferguson/Alamy

Conclusions (1) Local leadership and trusted messengers

→ Trust acts like a short-cut to effective climate communication.

→ Trust in central government and big business is low.

→ Local councillors are well placed to build on rural support for climate action by connecting national and international policy with local concerns.

Photo credit: Cultura Creative/Alamy

Conclusions (2). The core themes for effective communication

→ Climate policies: should be **pragmatic**, drawing on the past, preparing for the future, and maintaining what we care about.

→ Rural citizens are **proud** of, and want to protect the natural landscape and environment

→ **Recognise** the efforts people are already making to limit their impact on the environment.

→ **The concepts of fairness**, bringing the world back into **balance**, and maintaining a **clean and healthy natural environment** have broad appeal.

Next steps

→ Understanding the role of climate impacts and adaptation in building engagement.

→ Improve 'carbon literacy': help rural citizens understand what they can do to make a difference

→ Zooming in; build an evidence base that give a more granular picture: 'Cumbria Talks Climate ' or 'Guildford Talks Climate'

→ Understand how to bring along businesses and other organisations, help them take a leadership role

→ Post-covid, draw on stories of regeneration, recovery, and renewal

Appendix:
Narratives for communicating low carbon policies to rural BTC segments

Photo credit: Amer Ghazzal/Alamy

Methodology for developing narratives

Drawn from:

1. **An extensive international body of social sciences research** demonstrating the role of values and identity in shaping public attitudes to climate science and climate policies. People make sense of the world not through facts but stories. Stories which speak to the values and identity of the audience will be more effective.

2. **Climate Outreach research in multiple countries applying those scientific principles to the development and testing of narratives in surveys and workshops.** This research is carried out with audiences segmented on the basis of their values and worldviews. Participants are asked to read narratives and mark words, frames and phrases which evoke strong feelings, either negative or positive. Their reasoning is then discussed

3. **Synthesising across the Climate Outreach research base and the social science literature to highlight consistent patterns in how groups respond to particular language.** This analysis reveals persistent patterns across time and space about how values shape attitudes to climate policy.

Photo credit: Simon Turner / Alamy

Five policy areas for a low carbon future & how to communicate them

1 Improve housing stock

2 Reduce car use in town centres

3 Reduce waste through circular economy

4 More renewables

5 Greening of towns, caring for green spaces

1 Improve Housing Stock

→ Make a link to **love of heritage** and old buildings

> "We love our heritage and our old buildings. They create a link with the past, make our towns and cities distinct, beautiful and our own. Now is the time to prepare that heritage for the future.We can renew our older buildings - provide them with a new lease of life and make them fit for new purposes in the 21st century."

→ Talk about reducing the **waste** of energy

→ Reduce heating costs (**fairness**)

→ Creation of **decent, local** jobs

From "More United Than You'd Think"
Report by Centre for Towns (2020)

Photo credit: Rosemary Roberts/Alamy

2   Reduce car use

→   People in villages, communities and small towns are less likely to support higher taxes on car users or ending the sale and use of petrol and diesel vehicles (32% compared to 44% in urban)*

→   Link desire for greater connectivity to public transport, getting communities connected:

"Rural services like fast broadband and decent public transport are the glue that holds our communities together. We've been pushing for decades to see improvements to these in our rural communities"

→   Reduced air pollution (**clean**)

→   Nicer, safer environment (**aesthetics**, **security**)

→   Acknowledge imbalance in rural/urban reliance on cars

Photo credit: Mark Boulton/Alamy

3 Reduce waste through circular economy

→ Talk about maintaining and **restoring** natural **balance**

→ Reducing **waste** in money as well as materials

→ And responsible **stewardship** of resources

"Farmers recognise the importance of looking after the land. We already understand how to live and work in the countryside without damaging it. We need to restore balance by using resources that can be replenished and renewed, to respect the land, and ensure its continuity."

Photo credit: Greenshoots Communications/Alamy

4 More renewables

→ Highlight the **historical** role of renewables- the windmills and waterwheels that powered the countryside

→ Talk about renewable energy as something the country can be **proud** of, a **stable, reliable, efficient** source of energy

→ **Decent, secure jobs** in rural areas for young people

"Some of the new technologies - wind power, solar energy, hydro power - can potentially create decent, secure jobs in rural areas like ours... We should also be thinking about what our young people need and what kinds of jobs they are going to be doing here in the future."

5 Greening of towns

→ Protecting the landscape and wildlife (restoring **balance**, connecting with the **past**)

> "For centuries rural communities have been the guardians of the environment and our landscapes. No one in our communities wants to see those things damaged or degraded… These landscapes are not just home to our local wildlife but also part of the fabric of our local community and economy."

→ Improve the attractiveness of the area (**pride, aesthetics**)

→ Investing in the local community

Appendix:
General Annotated Narratives

Example Narrative:

Guardians of the countryside

For centuries rural communities have been the guardians of the environment and our landscapes. No one in our communities wants to see those things damaged or degraded.

It's right that we should **continue** in our role as guardians and protectors of these landscapes, especially now that they face the **new** threat of climate change. These landscapes are not just home to our local wildlife but also part of the fabric of our local community and economy.

We understand the threat posed by climate change to these landscapes more than anyone, and it's vital that we are given the resources we need to continue protecting them.

Evocative way to emphasise the importance of rural communities / people in the protection of the environment and landscape

Fabric: to denote the connections between people and the environment

Stressing continuity shows how policy changes help to *maintain* security and preserve what people value

Example Narrative: Rural ways of life are already sustainable ways of life

Many of us living in this area are already living lives that protect the environment around us. These practices are simply part of our day to day life.

We already know the importance of buying from our local suppliers and farmers and supporting our local economy.

We already understand how to live and work in the countryside without damaging it.

We were doing this long before it became trendy. We now have a chance to show others how to do this.

The environment *around us,* rather than just "the environment". Makes it more tangible and emphasises the local environment rather than the environment generally

Use "ways of life" or "day to day", rather than "lifestyles", which can bring up associations with the middle-class urban elite

Talk about a *working landscape* and emphasise the idea of the countryside as a productive region that contributes greatly to national life and economy

Emphasises the history and identity of centre-right-led environmentalism. Often centre-right audiences perceive typical environmentalism as "jumping on the bandwagon"

"Do's and don'ts"
1 focus on local identity and knowledge
5 Recognition of efforts already made
6 Frame action positively

Example Narrative: Local leadership on flooding

Talk about the need for initiative and local leadership

"Making a plan" emphasises stability and pragmatism/addressing to problems sensibly

"Do's and don'ts"
1 Local leadership
6 Frame action positively
9 Climate action is pragmatism

It's no secret that rural areas are not the priority when it comes to flood protection.

We need to be taking the lead when it comes to dealing with flooding, not waiting for someone else to come and deal with it - because what we've seen is that they won't.

Unfortunately we know that climate change is going to make these kinds of major flooding events worse. So we must start making our own plans to protect our area and to protect our local community from these events.

While flooding may not apply to all council areas, here is an example "formula" for talking about climate impacts more generally:

1. **Pride** in how we have responded to past extreme weather events
2. **Recognition** that the weather is changing and we need to **prepare** for future events to protect communities, properties
3. Need to obtain **good quality information** about what to expect
4. Need to work with **local councils, community networks**, to identify action plans

Example Narrative: Local preparation for extreme weather

People in our areas are very well aware that the weather is changing and that the seasons are altering. We work and live in this landscape and we notice the changes of the seasons, and the weather around us.

We are well prepared to change - over the generations there have been many changes in the way we use the land, the way we live on the land, the make up of rural communities, and the crops we grow. But what is really important here is that we receive the best information about what to expect, and the support that we need to respond and prepare.

Start with people's personal experience, grounded in the framing that they are experts in the environment

Connects present with the past and the future, and establishes continuity. It accepts the idea that there will be change over time and we need to prepare.

Link personal experience with science/evidence about what to expect in future, and how best to prepare

"Do's and don'ts"
1 focus on local identity and knowledge
5 Recognition of efforts already made
10 Frame change as continuity

Example Narrative: Young people and low-carbon jobs

Emphasise duty to future generations of rural citizens

Statements such as these reflect the major contribution of rural people to national life, and that the land is the result of their hard work

No one wants to see our rural communities slowly disappear. Some of the new technologies - wind power, solar energy, hydro power - can potentially create decent, secure jobs in rural areas like ours.

These developments have been controversial in some areas, but we should also be thinking about what our young people need and what kinds of jobs they are going to be doing here in the future.

This is a living and working landscape- not something to be put in a museum. There is not one part of this area that has not been shaped by the work of people in this area. These new technologies give us the chance to create practical, hands on jobs in our area and we need to fight to have those jobs here - or we will lose out.

Talk about the quality of work - draw on sense of pride in "hands-on", decent, hard work

Example Narrative: Rural low-carbon services

Rural services like fast broadband and decent public transport are the glue that holds our communities together. We've been pushing for years to see improvements to these in our rural communities.

Low carbon transport and remote working are now also being promoted as part of the answer to the problem of climate change, and this gives us a chance to make the case even more powerfully for these things in our communities.

Getting our communities connected in these ways is now also part of the fight against climate change.

Emphasises the additional benefits

Link low-carbon policy actions to issues that are already of concern to rural communities

"Do's and don'ts"
3 Lead with unifying values
6 Frame action positively

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Background

Climate Outreach was invited by Purpose and the Countryside Climate Network to deliver a slide deck and briefing, to equip rural councillors with the tools required to effectively engage their audiences on climate change.

This is an evidenced based toolkit based on up to date research.