

Sustainable Woodstock's Ed King reviews the Oxford-based Climate Outreach report "Britain Talks Climate"

Whisper it, but most people in the UK agree that climate change is a problem.

That statement might seem surprising. After all, we're all used to picking up a copy of the Daily Mail or Daily Express and reading about the evils of those dastardly greens.

If you remember, those hemp-eaters are the ones who will lead us to socialist ruin, have us eating shreddies for Sunday lunch and dressing in leaves.

Thing is, it turns out the majority of the public are less sold on a country with polluted streets, diseased lungs and waters choked with plastic.

Last week saw the launch of [Britain Talks Climate](#), a major new study into public perceptions of climate change, conducted by Oxford-based Climate Outreach.

Based on multiple surveys with 10,000 British adults, as well as 60 hours of focus groups and interviews, the data reveals a high level of consensus among adults across the UK.

There is broad-based agreement that human action is causing global warming (the forces of organised climate denial find little support). Worries about its effects are resoundingly not the sole preserve of the young or the urban or left of centre.

The report comes at a critical time for the UK. Ministers such as Woodstock's local MP Robert Courts are working through plans to kickstart growth in 2021.

With a COVID vaccine now weeks away (notwithstanding deployment issues) the government is eyeing an economic reboot.

How it does this will determine the type of country we live in for the next decade, if not more, given the legacy the vast sums of money involved will leave – so it's critical that government grasp how much support there is among the public for a greener future.

Below are 5 things I learned from reading the study:

1 - Climate is an issue that can unite us: Climate change is an issue on which there is a growing social consensus, no matter how old a person is, what political party they support, how much they earn, or where they live. Nearly three-quarters (74%) believe that *'working together to protect the environment could build a society that's based on sharing not selfishness, community not division'*.

However, although a sense of social solidarity has grown this year as a result of Covid-19, a belief in empathy and togetherness is beginning to slip back again. Fatalism is a real risk, with the majority (55%) believing that people in power are too focused on short-term gains to make a difference.

2 - People believe in the strength of a green economy: Climate concern has not diminished as a result of Covid-19. In fact, a majority believe we should use public money to tackle climate change in our recovery from Covid-19, even if it costs more in the short-term (62%). Before the pandemic, every group up and down the country saw cutting carbon as an opportunity to create new jobs (70%).

This belief has even greater saliency now, as industry shut-down and loss of employment hit home. A majority in five of the segments [*of groups interviewed for the research report - ed*], and 59% overall, want the political party they voted for to do more on climate and the environment. Just 7% want them to do less.

3 - The transition must be fair: Not everyone is convinced that the transition to a low-carbon economy will include them, particularly those who are less well-off and/or more likely to be unemployed or facing a big loss in income. These groups are too busy surviving from day to day to give climate change more of their attention, and recognise that lifestyle changes are more possible among high-earning, high-consuming segments.

Those of us who believe that the low carbon economy is the future should focus on local benefits, talk about “fairness”, and be grounded in practical examples of real, relatable jobs - not abstract rhetoric around a green future.

4 – Government must deliver: There is widespread recognition that we are already feeling the effects of climate change across Britain (57%), and that the threat requires a global, not only a national, response (72%). More believe in the need for urgent, radical change (51%) over slow, gradual change (31%) but there is significant variation between segments and language must be carefully chosen. Calls for the UK to become a “global leader” are unlikely to be welcomed by some. Claims of “global leadership” will be rejected by others who are despairing about governments’ moral collapse on the issue.

5 – Sustainable Woodstock is leading the way: No, the group did not get a mention in the report, but it’s important to emphasise that for most Britons, the climate struggle is about preserving the natural environment and creating a healthier society for future generations.

Yes, it’s true, many in the study said they feel intimidated by activists’ level of personal and political commitment, and don’t know what they can reasonably do to make a difference. We need to broaden the offer of what it means to be “active” on climate and related issues.

What does all this mean? Well, my take is it shows that the work of Sustainable Woodstock and other local groups is absolutely vital. Despite all this country’s well documented political differences, on climate and the environment we are remarkably at one.

And if by engaging in the community we can instil that love of nature in neighbours and children, then in my book – and in the view of the majority of our fellow Brits, we’re winning.

Ed King - November 2020