

From stories to policies:

How do we create a more equal future for
Wales in the face of climate change?



Context & purpose

This briefing explores what policymakers should take away from conversations with communities about their hopes and fears for Wales in a future with climate change. The briefing is based on a project carried out by futures thinkers, [FLiNT](#), on behalf of Public Health Wales and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.



Climate change poses significant risks to health and society now and in the future. There are policies and proposals in place across Wales to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. However, unless we proactively look for opportunities to promote equality in climate change policy development, existing socio-economic inequalities in Wales risk being carried into the future.

Here we set out what we learned when we involved people from communities who are often under-represented; and the implications this has for policymakers working in climate change and beyond.

A full report on the findings of the project can be found [here](#).



Summary

Policies and proposals to tackle and adapt to climate change have the potential to worsen existing inequalities in a future Wales. The goals within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires Welsh policymakers to take a long-term view so that their decisions do not impact negatively on future generations.



Involving and understanding what the long-term future looks like from the perspective of different population groups is vital for developing policies that create a better future Wales for everyone.

Participatory futures techniques are one way in which public bodies can involve communities in thinking about the long-term, in line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. In this exemplar project, we heard from communities who are often under-represented in climate change policy discussions. What we learned from their views of the future highlight five priority areas for policy and decision-makers to consider:

Everything is connected.

People think holistically about climate change and the environment. Our communications and actions need to reflect this by being similarly integrated and framed in order to achieve the best impact.

More Talk Grows Hope.

Information gaps can lead to eco-anxiety. Collaboration with representative groups can help ensure key messages are effectively communicated to marginalised communities.

Action is Best Taken Together.

There is an appetite among local communities to be part of a solution. Valuing the expertise and skills that already exist in communities and bring down barriers to involvement is needed to enable action.

Green spaces for all places.

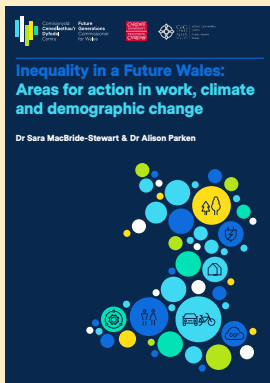
Green spaces were seen as important to health, well-being and community but participants were not confident that decision-makers shared this view. Communities need to trust that they will be involved in decisions about the development and protection of green spaces.

Transport that leaves no one behind.

The direction of transport strategies needs to continue its move towards focusing on active, low-carbon public transport. But this shift must work for all members of our communities, connecting people and places, to avoid isolation and the loss of freedoms.

Why did we do this work?

In 2021, Public Health Wales and the Future Generations Commissioner commissioned the Inequality in a Future Wales project. Working with academics at Cardiff University, the first phase of the work revealed that unless we change course, the changing nature of work, demographic change, and climate change all have the potential to worsen existing inequalities. It highlighted that only by understanding how trends and policies impact different people in different ways will we be able to make decisions that create a Wales that works for everyone – putting involvement and long-term thinking front and centre.



Building on the findings of the report, this second phase of the project seeks to demonstrate how to creatively involve communities in long-term thinking about the policies and decisions that will affect them. Reflecting the ways of working set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, this project worked collaboratively with partner organisations to involve communities in thinking about the long-term impact of climate change on their lives. It aimed to highlight people's hopes and fears in order help prevent unintended negative impacts of policy decisions, and demonstrate how the findings and the approach can be integrated into other policy areas.

What did it involve?

Working with community group advocates and climate change stakeholders, we identified the communities whose voices needed to be heard on what climate change meant for their future. With the support of partner organisations, we involved people living with disability; rural and farming communities; black and minority ethnic women and refugees; social landlords and renters; people already affected by climate change; and school-age young people.

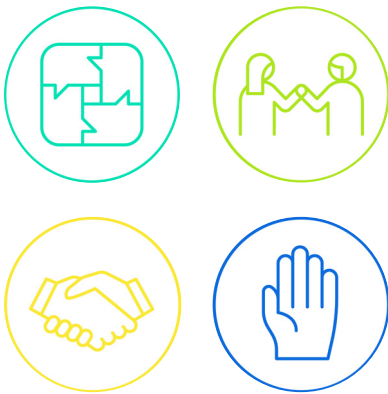


Drawing on FLiNT's expertise, the project used creative approaches based on storytelling to involve communities in long-term thinking and explore their hopes, fears and expectations for the future. More information on the methodology can be found [here](#). In total 142 people across Wales shared their stories of the future with us either by writing letters or postcards to or from the future, or by working together to build a character that experienced the future of climate change.

What did we learn?

Everything is connected

The people we spoke to did not differentiate between climate change and other environmental issues, or between global issues and those happening on their front door. They spoke holistically about their neighbourhood and the wider world in the same breath, seeing them as connected by a shared disrespect for nature and the environment.



What does this mean for how we work?

Keep joining the dots. Tackling climate and nature emergencies requires significant action across sectors and policy areas. In order to make progress it can be necessary to focus on specific tasks and actions. While this can move things forward it is important that it does not result in decisions having unintended consequences. Especially as this is often how decisions that create or worsen inequalities creep in. Avoiding siloed working and embracing the complexity and interconnectedness of these issues is essential to ensure the progress made works for everyone.

Language and framing is key. Climate change will affect everyone in Wales, and we can all have a role to play in responding to it. Engaging and communicating with the public in a way that resonates with them has to start from how they perceive climate change: as part of a wider natural world that is being abused and neglected. Using this framing and avoiding jargon or enforcing our own language on to others may improve the impact of messages



More talk grows hope

There was a level of anxiety among participants as to what the impact of climate change was likely to be and how decisions made in response to it might adversely affect some people. For example, some people with disabilities shared their worries that they may no longer be able to use or afford to replace their adapted diesel vehicles if they were banned in the future.



What does this mean for how we work?

Be inclusive and open. It often appeared that people were filling a vacuum of information with their worries. To avoid increasing eco-anxiety, especially within more marginalised groups, policymakers could proactively collaborate with representative organisations to not only understand the issues during policy development, but also to communicate how policies might affect them and any mitigating support that might be made available.

Action is best taken together

Speaking to communities revealed an appetite to be involved in work to tackle climate change, to make a difference and come together as communities and neighbours to take action. However, there was a lack of awareness of what opportunities or support were available for them to do this.



What does this mean for how we work?

Value existing expertise. Financial constraints mean that members of our most deprived communities have already had to adapt the way they live out of necessity and in doing so they are already more climate and nature friendly. For example, they may already use more public transport or less energy. It is important to avoid patronising discourse and ensure the knowledge and strengths in these communities can be shared and learnt from.

Take down barriers. Community assets support community action. But participants noted that cost was often a prohibiting factor in bringing a community together. In areas where communities have limited financial resources, organisations and institutes could work in partnership to explore how their assets could be used to support local community-led action. To maximise opportunities for community-led actions, funding opportunities also need to be well communicated to different communities and other barriers to involvement identified and reduced.

Provide helpful nudges. Enthusiasm for a cause does not always translate into to action. A behavioural science approach could help support communities to bridge the gap between intention and action and help them be part of the solution they want to see.

Green spaces for all places

The importance of green spaces for both physical and mental health, and its ability to bring communities together came out clearly from the stories shared. However, this was matched by fears that green spaces were not prioritised or protected by institutions enough, particularly in urban areas, and that they could be removed at any point, leading to a sense of distrust and disempowerment.



What does this mean for how we work?

Make space for nature. To boost health and well-being, local areas need to prioritise keeping green spaces in their neighbourhoods that can help protect wildlife and provide opportunities to enjoy and exercise in the outdoors. Because of the connections people make between the quality of their local areas and the wider environment, making progress locally could help build support and momentum to tackle more global issues. Doing this well would include involving communities in decisions about their local green spaces and giving them a sense of ownership; building and maintaining their trust that their green space will be protected.

Transport that leaves no one behind

The ways that climate change policies may impact on how people commute to work, get to the shops, or visit family and friends was front of mind for many. Moving towards more active and public transport has for a long time been recognised as a crucial part of reducing emissions and bringing other benefits to the environment and people's health. But the stories that were shared highlighted concerns around how people with disabilities and those in lower income groups or rural communities may be negatively affected by these changes



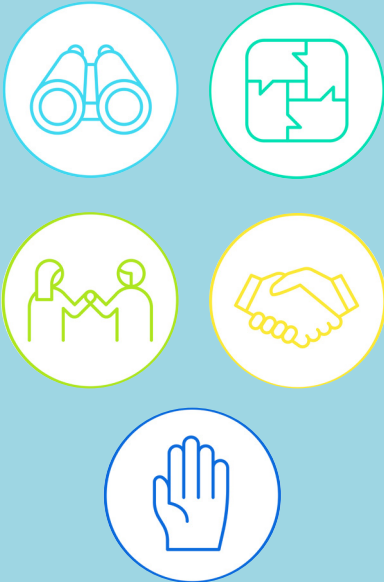
What does this mean for how we work?

All aboard. In order to create a transport system that works for everyone, everyone needs to have a say in its development. Being able to access affordable transport options that are fit for purpose is essential for work and family life, and for many offers freedom and independence. Involving those who may be particularly reliant on certain modes of transport, or have specific needs, is vital for ensuring that no one gets left behind.

Getting where you want to go. For those who were able to use it, public transport was seen as a positive choice both personally and for the environment. However, participants reported that routes often missed key locations such as affordable supermarkets, libraries and health facilities. When public transport routes are reviewed or developments such as housing or community assets drawn up, involving local people in those decisions will ensure that these important considerations are not missed.

Conclusion

This project sought to explore new ways of working, as called for in our previous Inequalities in a Future Wales report, to ensure that efforts to mitigate against the effects of climate change do not inadvertently exacerbate inequalities.



This work demonstrates that by implementing the involvement and long-term ways of working from the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, we can learn what communities hope and fear for in a future Wales. This fuller understanding, which may not surface without active involvement, can provide vital insight on how policies can be developed to leave no one behind.

By reflecting on what the findings of this long-term thinking means for the way we work today, it is also clear that embedding all five ways of working is necessary to address the climate and nature emergency; from integrating our work to join the dots, to involving and collaborating with communities to find shared solutions and taking early action to prevent negative impacts on health, well-being and equality.

With the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) 2015 Act and the Socio-economic Duty, policymakers in Wales have the levers they need to ensure that today's inequalities are not carried into the future. The climate and nature emergency requires an integrated and collaborative response, a response that places involvement of all communities at the heart of long-term decision making and action. Working together in this way will create a future Wales where all people and our planet can thrive.



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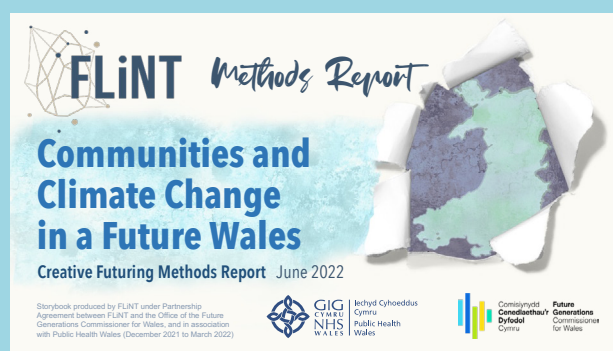
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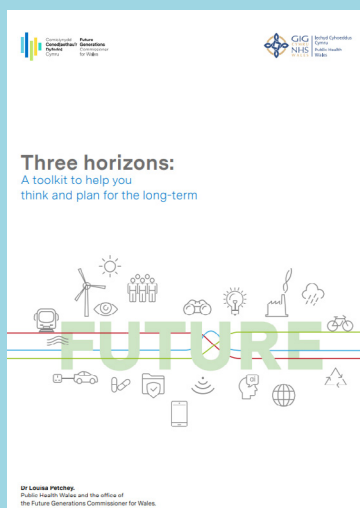
Further reading:



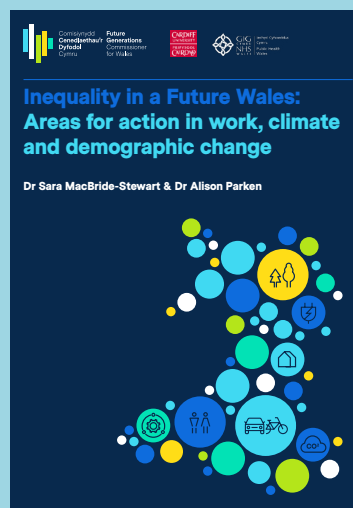
Communities and Climate Change in a Future Wales: Storybook



Communities and Climate Change in a Future Wales: Methodology Report



Three Horizons: A toolkit to help you think and plan for the long-term



Inequality in a Future Wales: Areas for action in work, climate and demographic change, November 2021