

Final report August 2025

Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Conversation



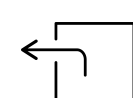
Derry City & Strabane
District Council
Comhairle
Chathair Dhoire &
Cheantar an tSratha Báin
Derry Cittie & Strabane
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Quantum





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With thanks

With thanks to the 15
'conversation starters' who
contributed their time, energy
and ideas to the Derry City and
Strabane District Council
Community Conversation:

Aidan, Ann-Louise, Colm, Denice,
John, Karen, Mabel, Mary, Nina,
Rosemary, R, Sheena, Siobhan,
Shakira, Tabassum and Una.

With thanks to Innovate UK who
funded this work as part of the [Net
Zero Living](#) programme.



Executive summary

The Derry and Strabane Sustainability and Climate Commission recognised a gap in how local climate priorities were being shaped.

Whilst there was active engagement from some communities, other voices were underrepresented in discussions. To develop a climate action plan rooted in real community priorities, the Commission needed to hear from people in all parts of the district – especially those in easier to ignore, economically underserved and rural and remote areas.

As part of Innovate UK's [Net Zero Living](#) programme, Involve, Forum for the Future, Ipsos and Quantum Strategy & Technology ran a **Community Conversation**. The aim was to put citizen ambitions for the future of the place they call home at the heart of the emerging sustainability and climate action plans of the Commission and Council.

The process brought together 15 'conversation starters', a group of residents broadly reflective of the city and district of DCSDC across demographics (see [Who took part?](#)).

Through two three hour evening sessions, two full Saturday workshops and a full Saturday co-creation workshop, the group learned how to hold inclusive, productive conversations with their communities, and then brought that insight back to identify themes, insights and actionable ideas. (see [next slide](#))

Derry City and Strabane District Council will publish the group's vision and recommendations on its website, along with a formal response incorporating input from other relevant parties.

Where recommendations cannot be taken forward, the council will explain why and suggest alternatives. They are also exploring the creation of a local Citizens' Assembly to maintain ongoing climate action and community involvement.



Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Conversation

Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Conversation



Summary of recommendations

These were prioritised by the group on their final day.

Quick wins:

- Raise Awareness About Cycling
- Make Public Transport More Affordable
- Better bus routes and expansion of rail across Derry City and Strabane
- Community Involvement in Planning
- Better Access to Planning Consultations
- New Environmental Legislation
- More transparent information and decision making processes
- Road Design and Traffic Planning
- Improve local awareness
- Climate change integration in schools
- Climate change education beyond schools
- Gamification and local community groups
- Special protections for AONBs and Biodiversity
- Address the impact of white LED street lights on birds, insects and bats
- Information on how and where to dispose of waste
- Improve the quality of existing homes
- Regular water testing

Longer-term priorities

- Planning for Health
- Greenspaces for Nature and Climate
- Stronger Zones in Local Development Plans
- Planning for Climate Change
- Wind farms in the right place
- Support informed decision making around wind energy infrastructure
- Help people to retrofit their homes and public buildings for energy efficiency
- Reduce Energy Waste
- More transparency and regulation of Data Centres
- Tackle Congestion at Key Traffic Points
- Stop the Use of Herbicides on Roads
- Ensure Green Space Provision in New Housing Developments
- Prevent the Destruction of Peatlands
- Support Pollinators and Reduce Harmful Practices
- Address farming practices that harm the environment
- Establish an independent EPA
- Joined up environmental protection across the island of Ireland
- More prosecution for environmental crimes
- Make better use of existing house stock
- Introduce rent control
- Update building codes to reflect environmental standards

**I think it's quite exciting.
I feel quite privileged to
be a part of this process.**

**I hope the very strong and
sincere concerns people have
are acted upon and respected.
I look forward to seeing these
reflected in council policy
and actions.**

One of the participants



Next steps

The next stage arising from the Community Conversations will be the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly, to be taken forward as part of the Commission's work.

Progress in this area will remain subject to the availability of appropriate funding and resources.

In order to reflect the outcomes of the Community Conversations and the wider deliberations of the Commission, the following Working Groups will be established as part of Phase II of the programme, see the next page.



PHASE II 2025-2028 - Sectoral Working Groups

Cross-Cutting Themes

Comm & Behaviour Change

Adaptation & Resilience

Equity & Justice

Citizens' Assembly

**Education & Learning
Working Group**

Community & Health Working Group

**Green Infrastructure
Land Use**

Waste/Circular Economy

Energy

Transport

Our Homes



Background and what we did



Derry and Strabane Sustainability and Climate Commission

The Derry and Strabane Sustainability and Climate Commission was established in January 2024 to foster collaboration among key stakeholders across the public, private, education, community, and voluntary sectors.

Its primary objective is to address the pressing challenges faced by local communities within the Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) area. Initially funded by Innovate UK, the Commission is now supported by DCSDC following the conclusion of Innovate UK's funding.

This transition marks a significant step in ensuring the Commission's ongoing efforts to promote sustainability and climate resilience in the region.

The Commission wanted to make sure local communities played a role in setting climate change priorities for the DCSDC area.



Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Conversation



Asset-based conversations

This project was designed around the principle of **building out based on what is important to people**, rather than being driven by an ‘outside in’ agenda of reaching net zero.

Conversation starters were supported to put this into practice, by starting discussions in their community on what makes Derry City and Strabane District Council unique and how this can be protected and built on in future.

The conversation was **not** a way to ‘consult’ on specific ideas the council has, or conduct qualitative research that produces detailed transcripts.

Instead, these asset-based conversations were seen as **another form of learning** to inform the group’s final prioritisation and decision making. In this way, this process values lived experience in equal measure to the specialist expertise of members of the Sustainability and Climate Commission.





The question

What can we all do to prepare for the impacts of climate change, while making our district a better place to live?



Recruitment

Involve recruited 17 'Conversation Starters' through a combination of community outreach, paid social media ads, and face-to-face on-street recruitment in underrepresented areas.

These were people who were self-selecting: meaning they saw some form of advertisement about the project and felt like they wanted to take part. Of the 36 who applied, we invited people on the basis of geographic spread, educational attainment, age, gender, and ethnicity to ensure the group reflected the diversity of the council area.

Involve onboarded each person, identifying accessibility needs, and sharing information on what was required of each participant.

You can find out more about who was involved in the section '[who took part](#)'.



We need you to talk about the future of Derry City and Strabane District.

We want to hear from you.

Register your interest by scanning the QR below, or phoning 020 3745 4334.

← Register by midnight, Fri, 28 Feb 2025

We're looking for 20 people to have conversations with their friends, family, colleagues and neighbours about the future of Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) area. No experience or knowledge is required.

Plus you'll receive £15 per hour* as a thank you for your time!

*This monetary gift may affect your benefits. Speak to your benefits advisor if you're unsure. You can take part without accepting the gift.

What we want to talk about:
What matters to you in the DCSDC area? What makes your community special? What do you love, or want to improve?

We want to hear about your vision for creating a healthier, greener, and more connected community.

How can the council and communities work together to make it happen?

  Derry City & Strabane District Council
Comhairle Chathair Dhoire & Cheantar an tSrátha Balaí
Derry City & Strabane District Council

 CLIMATE  involve  FORUM FOR THE FUTURE  Ipsos  Quantum





The Community Conversation at a glance

Learning

Deliberation

Decision making

Learning from speakers

The learning content was co-designed with participants. After an initial round of hearing from the council on what they were doing, the conversation starters worked together to form questions and their own handbook.

Participants discussed the information they had heard from their communities and developed a long list of ideas, weighing up potential ways forward. The council's climate team reviewed these and provided feedback.

Participants worked together to review feedback from the council and agree on a set of priority recommendations.

Learning through conversations

Through conversation with family, friends, work colleagues and neighbours, as well as each other, the participants learnt about the wider community's aspirations for the future of the area they call home.



Workshop 1

The project started with Workshop 1, held on Thursday, 20 March 2025. Its primary aim was to build connections among participants and introduce them to the project.

Through a relaxed, informal environment including food and warm welcomes, participants heard from the project team, a presentation on the local council initiatives, and structured opportunities for dialogue.

A key outcome was to increase participants' confidence in holding meaningful, impactful conversations.

Participants engaged in small group introductions, sharing thoughts on where they lived, what they valued, and what they would change.

Facilitators and participants worked together to develop a working agreement to support respectful, constructive dialogue.

Participants reflected on their own experiences and collaborated to create a list of “ingredients” for good conversations.

A key component of the session used the ORID method (see [appendix 1](#)).

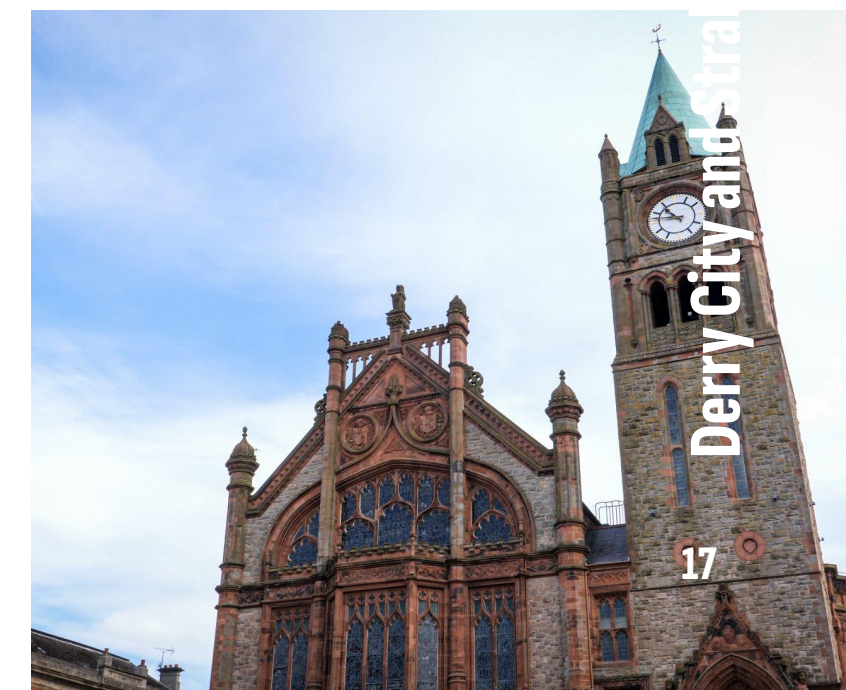


The conversation guide participants came up with together

1. (Provide some info about climate change and say) What do you think, what do you know about that?
2. What do you know, or are aware of about the climate issues that are around our area?
3. What concerns would you have about the environment for you, (or your family, or children,) in our area?
4. What concerns do you have for you and your children of the effects of climate change?
5. (For older people) What changes have they seen?
6. What do you think will fix it?
7. What have they seen elsewhere that they are envious of?
8. (To young people) What would you like to be doing in your community?
9. (This question can connect older and younger groups together too) What did you do when you were younger?
10. What would you like to happen?



Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Conversation





Workshop 2

Workshop 2, held on Saturday, 22 March 2025, shifted focus to climate change and its local impacts. The day began with check-ins using animal and word cards to spark reflection and connection. A short video introduction to climate change in the district led into an ORID-based group discussion about participants' emotional and practical responses to environmental change.

This helped surface shared concerns and personal insights about what they valued in their communities and how those things were being affected.

Participants then took part in mapping and prioritising exercises that explored their hopes for the future, current community challenges, and where they were already seeing climate impacts.

In small groups, participants role-played conversations they hoped to initiate and discussed strategies, challenges, and opportunities.

To close the day, participants shared their learnings and reviewed their personal action plans. They confirmed what support they would need and expressed how confident (or not) they felt about taking their conversations into their communities.

A key output of the day was the co-designed conversation resource pack—which included guidelines, suggested questions they developed together ([see p14](#)), and recording sheets—developed throughout the workshops and printed on-site.

The groups would continue to be supported by the participant liaison member of staff, who would check in on their progress and assist when needed.

Workshops 3 and 4

Three weeks later, after participants had completed their community conversations, we came back together.

Over two full days, participants shared back what they had heard from their conversations.

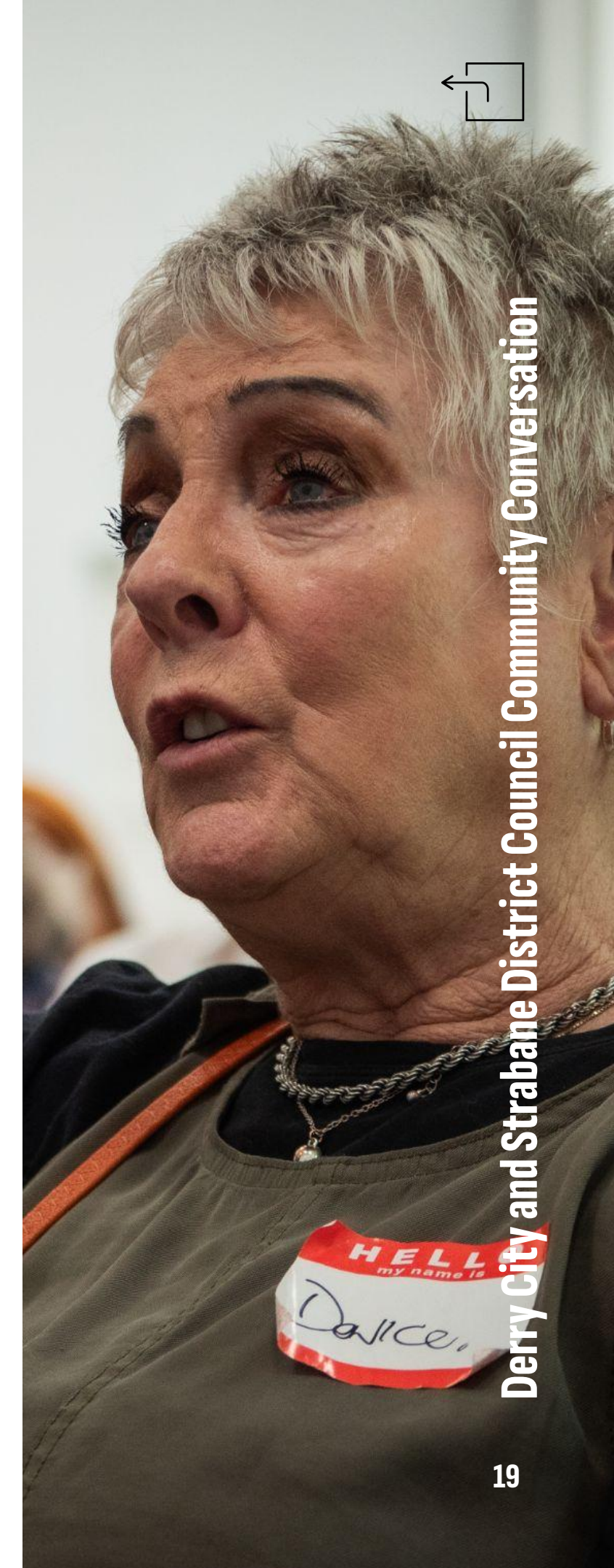
They subsequently identified overlaps and alignments within their findings.

Table facilitators noted key themes, phrases, or insights on flipcharts using keywords or post-its. The group then moved into pairs or trios for a more detailed debrief, where they discussed the content of their conversations more deeply and completed a simple written template.

These small groups were encouraged to choose a scribe or rotate that role and were welcome to move around the room for comfort.

After these focused conversations, the full table reconvened for a collective discussion to share what emerged.

Facilitators guided participants through identifying recurring topics, links to climate change, and any surprising or unique ideas. Contributions were clustered into loose themes and summarised on flipcharts. The participants felt they needed more time to collate everything they heard and the final session finished with an agreement from the project team and participants to rewrite ideas and review them again before the final workshop.





Workshop 5

The first core activity was a gallery review of the 50 ideas, giving participants time to revisit, reflect, and engage with the breadth of suggestions already developed. They had already been reviewed by some of the Climate Commission, who offered their own insight on what they thought was ‘easy or hard’ to implement and how impactful it would be.

The participants did not always agree with what was said by the Commission, and wanted to use the afternoon to review together.

Following a short break, the group reconvened in a circle to prepare for the afternoon collaboration. The participants shared what excited or worried them about working with the Commission, and what support they needed.

The group also discussed how to handle disagreement and raise concerns constructively. Key needs, roles, and final requests were captured visually, and a volunteer was invited to present these to the Commission later in the day.

When the Commission members arrived after lunch, the groups were mixed and challenged to brainstorm 100 uses for a shower curtain—a lighthearted way to strengthen group dynamics and spark imaginative thinking. Building on this energy, the group moved into the central task: collectively organising the 50 climate action ideas using a two-axis framework—impact and difficulty.

Participants and the Climate Commission members reflected on the distribution of ideas, identifying quick wins, high-impact priorities, and potential items to eliminate.

Commission members representing the themes developed during the workshops took part in the discussion. However, some themes had no representative present, and participants felt this lack of input could affect the chances of real change.

They were reminded that these ideas would be formally written up and shared with the Commission, which had committed to aligning the groups findings to the Commission's Climate Action Plans.

The session closed with space for feedback, appreciation, and informal celebration of what had been achieved and the whole journey.

The speed meet was good if a little manic.

One of the participants

Who took part?





Who took part?

Seventeen people were recruited to represent a diverse cross-section of the Derry City and Strabane District Council area. These participants engaged in thoughtful conversations and brought back insights from discussions with their respective communities. While we asked each participant speak to an average of three residents, many spoke to 5-10 each, resulting in insights gathered from at least 80 community members.

During the process, two members needed to drop out due to personal reasons.

Our 15 conversation starters were self-selecting; they heard about the project and applied to take part. They were chosen to be broadly reflective of Derry City and Strabane District Council's demographic profile.

Members of the group were given a £420 gift of thanks for participating in all sessions, to make participation accessible to all and in recognition of their time. We also covered travel and any additional costs such as childcare.

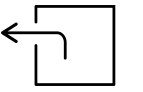
How were participants selected?

We used a mixed method approach to recruitment. This included sharing the opportunity through local community groups, distributing posters/leaflets and social media ads on Facebook.

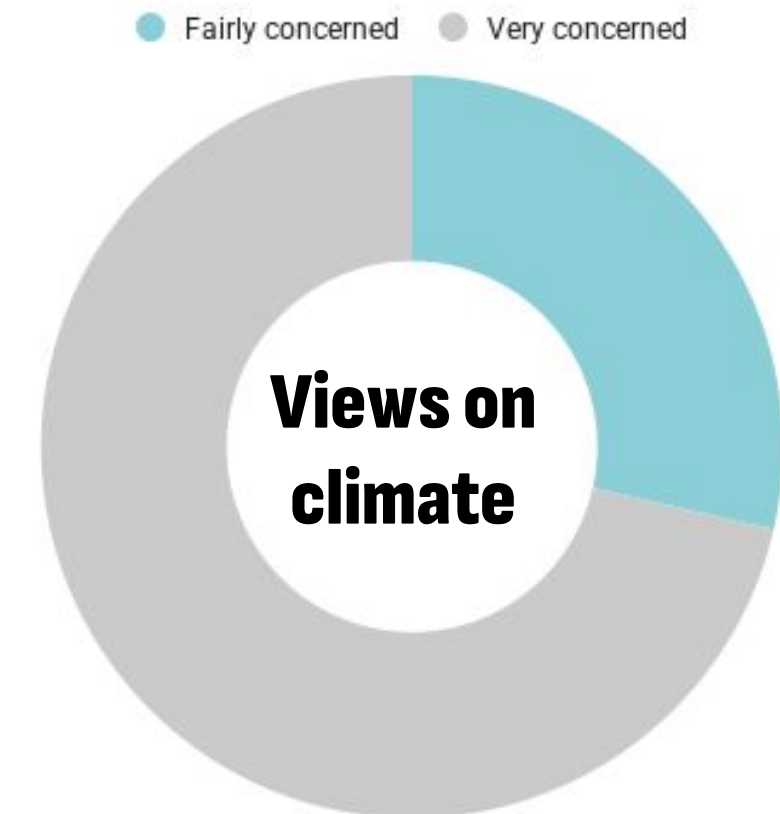
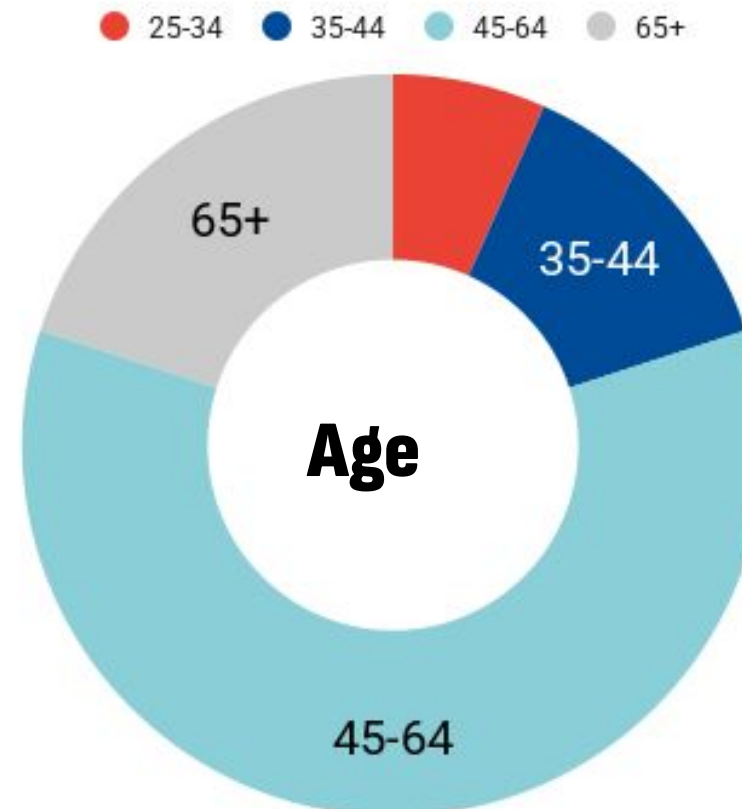
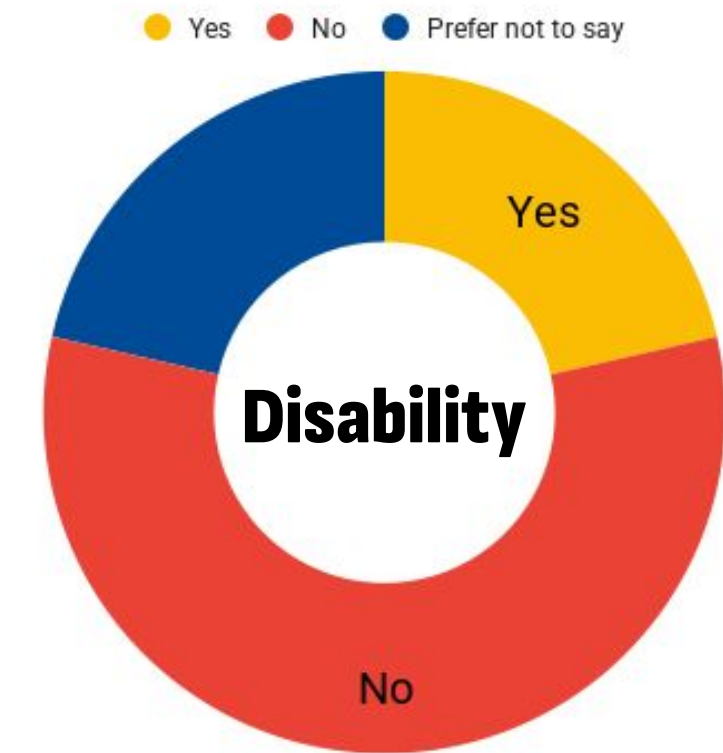
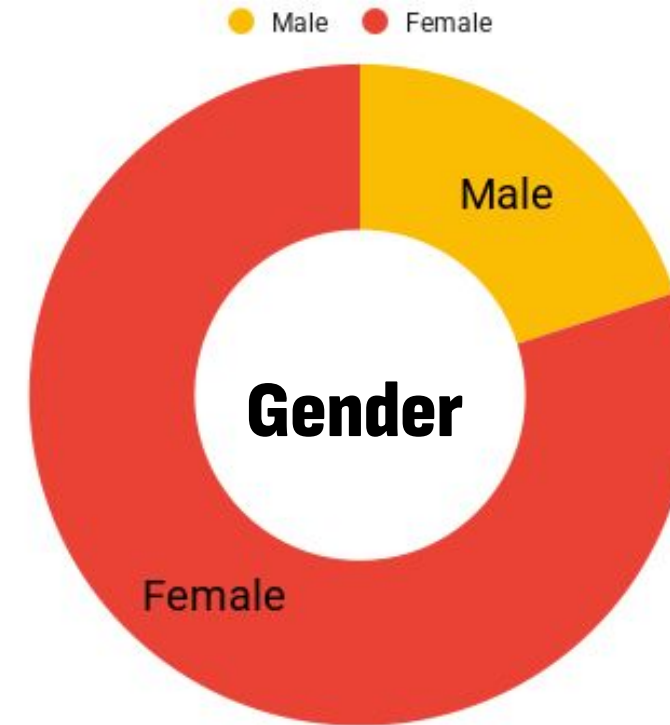
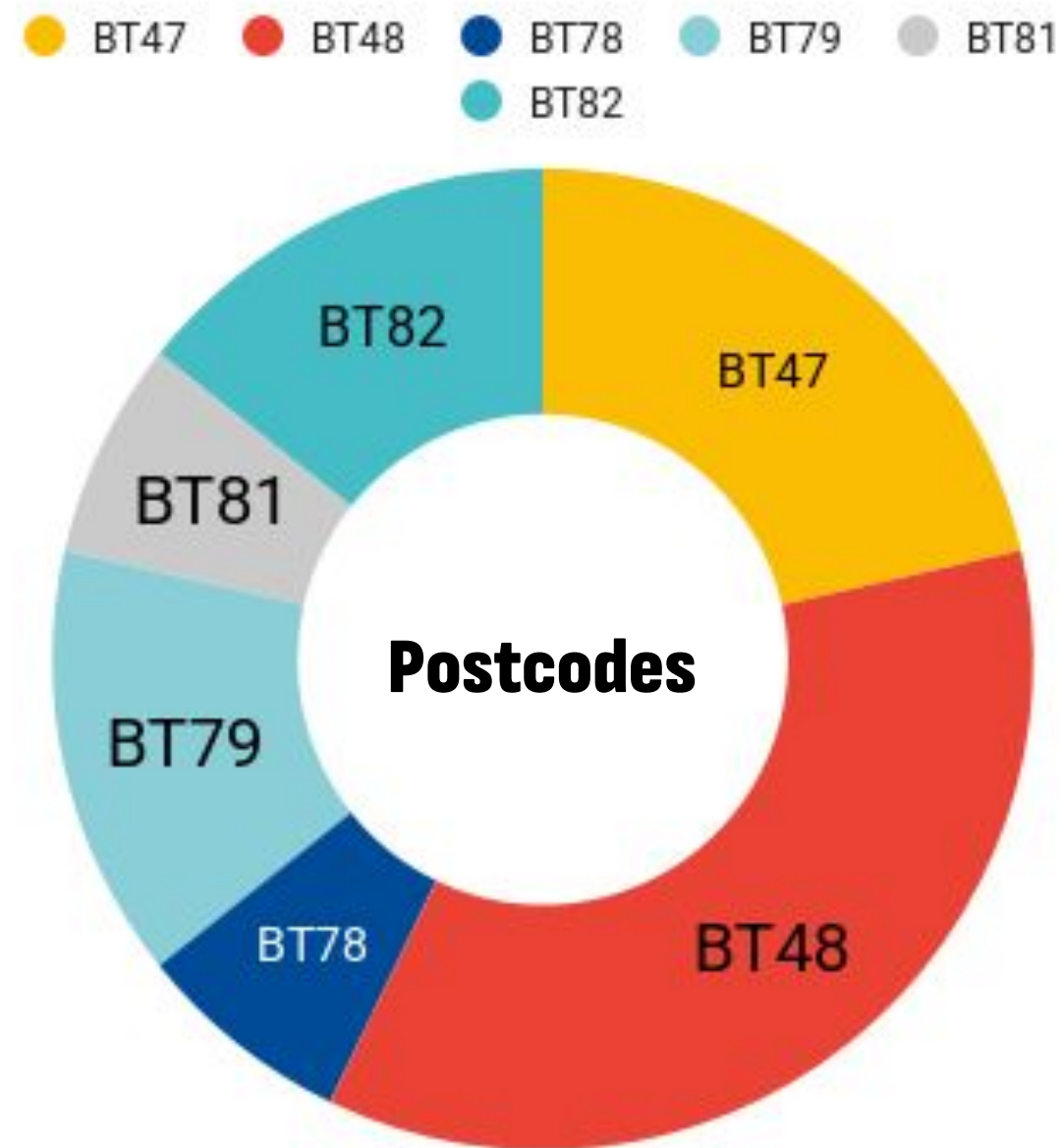
We targeted the in-person recruitment in the Strabane area half-way through, as sign-ups were lower.

Interested residents completed a form to express their interest in taking part. From there, we anonymised applications and selected a group by computer to be broadly reflective of the town in terms of their:

- Age
- Gender
- Disability
- Education level
- Attitudes to climate change



Make up of the group at a glance

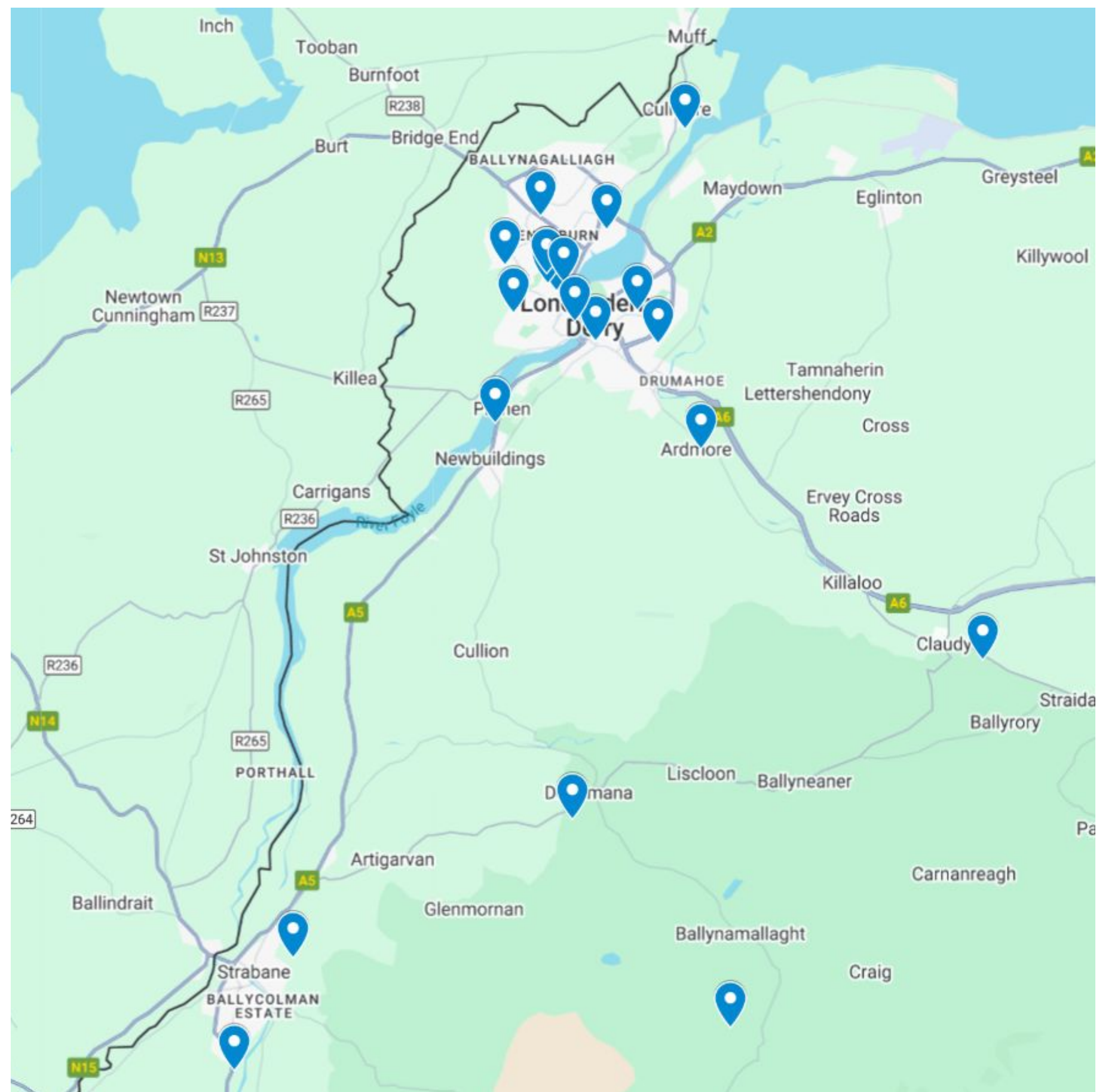


Recruitment detail

We agreed with Derry City and Strabane District Council Council to ensure the final group would have a good spread across demographics, attitudes and locations.

We aimed for a spread of participants across the characteristics in the registration form and location. The map on the right covers the first participants who signed up, allowing us to focus our efforts towards the end of the recruitment window in Strabane.

We had 1 participant from Ardmore, 1 from Brandywell, 1 from Creggan, 3 from Derry City, 1 from Castlederg, 1 from Ebrington, 1 from Lisnagelvin, 1 from Newtownstewart and 4 who identified themselves from 'rural', but the areas covered Strabane and areas closer to Omagh. One participant did not want their location to be disclosed.





The Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Conversation in numbers

15
conversation starters

took part, broadly reflective of the town across demographics

50
unique ideas

deliberated, agreed and written in participants' own words

45+
conversations

took place between sessions, with participants' friends, family and neighbours

400+
person hours

of learning, conversations, deliberation and writing recommendations



**I feel more aware,
educated about the
various subjects and
opinions from the
people I spoke with
and the other
conversation
starters, and of
course the fantastic
facilitators.**

One of the participants





50 Ideas for Climate Action

As mentioned previously, participants created **50 ideas** from their conversations. At the end of the process these ideas were shared with members of the Derry City and Strabane Sustainability and Climate Commission.

At the start of the Community Conversations process, the Council and the Commission made the following commitments to participants:

Where we support an action, we will:

Identify the department responsible for doing it

Be clear about things which might slow us down, or prevent us doing it

Explore ways of finding the money, time or skills needed to deliver it

If we cannot support an action, we will:

Explain clearly why they cannot take it forward

Suggest alternatives which we may be able to support

A survey was sent before the [in-person workshop](#), where Involve asked the Climate Commission to review the ideas and think about the following for each:

How easy is it to do? (scale)

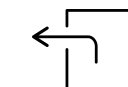
How impactful will it be... (scale)

Who could make it happen? (Open question)

During the workshop, the ideas were discussed more fully, including their recommendations for how to make them as impactful as possible, together with the Conversation Starters.



You can read the ideas along with the member's of the Climate Commission's thoughts by clicking on the image above.



In workshop 5 participants and the Climate Commission members collectively organised the 50 climate action ideas using a two-axis framework—impact and difficulty.

Ideas were assessed based on their potential to improve local communities while addressing climate change, and how easy they were to implement.

Together, everyone identified quick wins (easy and high impact) and longer term (high impact but harder to do) priorities.

You can read the quick wins and longer-term priorities in the next section. The rest of the ideas (low impact, hard to do, easy to do) are in [Appendix 2](#).

Quick wins

 High impact
 Easy to do



Transport



Raise Awareness About Cycling

What:

Provide public information on why cycling matters as a healthy and environmentally friendly way to travel, as well as where to buy affordable bikes, and how to maintain and repair them.

Why:

More people will consider cycling if they feel it's safe and worthwhile. Education helps shift attitudes and builds support for better cycling infrastructure.

Transport



Make Public Transport More Affordable

What:

Reduce the cost of both long and short bus journeys.
Look at options for free or subsidised travel, including targeted support for certain groups.

Why:

If driving is cheaper than taking the bus, people won't switch.
Lower costs will encourage more people to use public transport, which helps cut congestion and pollution.

Transport



Better bus routes and expansion of rail across Derry City and Strabane

Planning



Community Involvement in Planning

What:

Add more bus routes and improve the current ones so that communities across the council area are better connected.

Consider a circular route around Derry city, not just routes going into the centre, and the expansion of rail to the Strabane area.

Why:

Better public transport helps people get to services more easily, reduces the need to use cars, and helps build stronger community connections.

What:

Involve communities from the start in all planning processes, empower them and take their ideas seriously.

Why:

Local people know their area best. When they are part of the planning process, decisions are better, more fair, and more sustainable.

Planning

Better Access to Planning Consultations

What:

Make it easier and safer for people to take part in planning consultations, including allowing anonymous submissions if needed.

Why:

Some people feel intimidated by having to share their name and address when objecting to a planning application. This stops them speaking up, even when developments could damage local landscapes or communities.

Planning

New Environmental Legislation

What:

Introduce new legislation that brings together existing environmental protections and ensures they align with the Climate Act.

Why:

The current system is full of loopholes and weak enforcement. New laws are needed to protect the environment properly and make decision-makers accountable.

Local voices must be heard.

Planning

More transparent information and decision making processes

What:

When a decision is made, it should be accompanied by a clear timeframe and action plan with named people who are responsible, e.g. when motions are passed at council, the public should be informed of what will happen next.

Why:

People want to see changes with regard to sustainability and climate change, and need to see that action is being taken rather than just talking about it.

Planning

Road Design and Traffic Planning

What:

Improve road planning in Derry City by fixing traffic bottlenecks, updating signs and markings, expanding cycle lanes, and developing Park & Ride options.

Why:

Current road layouts create congestion, air pollution, and danger for pedestrians, especially children. Stressful driving conditions also lead to risky behaviour at junctions.

Eco-Education

Improve local awareness

What:

Not knowing what is happening in our local areas as well as the things that are happening failing to reach the most impacted.

Why:

We heard how there is a willingness to do things, but a lack of knowledge or ability to connect to issues or create change.

We think there needs to be more awareness of local schemes and what people can do: either through a social media campaign, or more engagement like this to reach more people. We think this could also look like information on practical things, like how to grow things, or why. This will build more community spirit and ownership in our communities.

Eco-Education

Climate change integration in schools

What:

Climate change should be fully embedded across the school curriculum, not just taught in one class or by one teacher.

All schools and educators should be connected and committed to delivering consistent, meaningful climate education.

Why:

Young people are key to driving change, and education should inspire a positive, creative connection with nature.

Guest speakers - independent and trusted voices, not large corporations - could help bring real-life relevance to topics like recycling, sustainability, and climate action. There should also be an option to study environmental management at A-level, and all practical courses, including apprenticeships, should include a focus on climate change and sustainability.

Eco-Education

Climate change education
beyond schools

Eco-Education

Gamification and local
community groups

What:

There needs to be better access to environmental information beyond school - including clear advice on sustainable products, local schemes, and the impact of everyday choices.

Why:

People want to make better, more sustainable decisions, but they often don't have the information they need.

When we make informed choices, especially about how we spend our money, we can influence big companies and push for change. The people we spoke to also highlighted that those most affected by climate issues often have the least voice, and that some of the information available is biased. They want more open, honest information about things like where the things we purchase come from, airmiles and emissions, food waste, local sustainability schemes, and the chemicals in everyday products - and how these affect both the environment and our mental health.

What:

We want to create more spaces, like community centres, where people can come together to talk about climate issues and share ideas.

Why:

There could be an incentive for people to do more to help the environment, such as buying green products or adopting sustainable practices.

If these efforts are shared within community groups, it could raise awareness and inspire others to get involved too.

Biodiversity

Special protections for AONBs and Biodiversity

What:

Bring AONB designation in line with stronger protections used in Great Britain. Ensure that the Sperrins Management Plan has legal status and provides real protection for these areas. Restrictions on industry, developments, and extraction across the whole of the AONB.

Why:

AONBs should have legal protections to stop over farming and industrial development that damage biodiversity. Without protection, we risk losing vital habitats like peatlands, which are essential for biodiversity and people’s health.

To restrict the last remaining wilderness and biodiversity.

Biodiversity

Address the Impact of White LED Street Lights on Birds, Bats and Insects

What:

Review and modify the use of white LED street lights, as they negatively impact birds, bats and insects.

Why:

Bright white lights disturb nocturnal wildlife like birds and bats, disrupting their natural behaviours and habitats. Adjusting street lighting can help protect these important species.

Waste

Information on how and where to dispose of waste

Housing

Improve the Quality of Existing Homes

What:

There needs to be clear and accessible information on what to recycle and how.

Why:

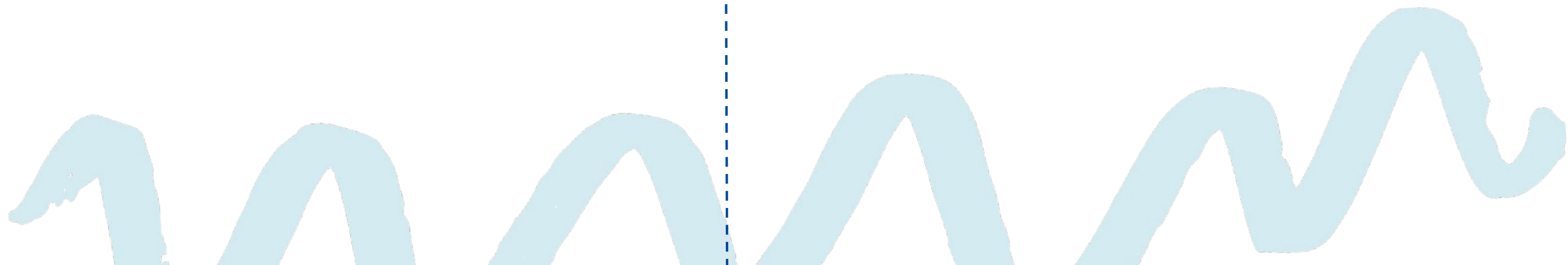
We heard mixed understandings of how and what to recycle, and think there should be clearer information from the council (stickers on bins, leaflets), campaigns and also clearer supermarket packaging on how to recycle.

What:

Introduce minimum standards related to climate change to renovate and retrofit all existing houses, supported by measures that are affordable e.g. grants.

Why:

The quality of our homes affects health and well-being, and this idea would also address what people spend, our carbon footprints and be more sustainable in the long run.



Environmental Protection



Regular water testing

What:

Regular water testing with transparent results, including using citizen science.

Why:

To deal with water pollution early and find the causes of contamination more quickly.



Longer term priorities

🎯 High impact
🚀 Harder to do



Planning

Planning for Health

What:

Design towns and communities in ways that support people’s physical and mental health: places that are safe, walkable, green, and well connected.

Why:

Where we live affects our health. Good planning helps create healthy communities where people can live, work, and play. But planning is too often influenced by politics instead of people’s needs.

Planning

Greenspaces for Nature and Climate

What:

Mandate wild greenspaces, green roofs, and nature-friendly infrastructure like wildlife crossings. Use public funding to support these changes.

Why:

Wilder greenspaces support pollinators, absorb carbon, reduce flooding, and create healthier environments. Other countries are doing this—Northern Ireland should too.

Planning

Stronger Zones in Local Development Plans

Planning

Planning for Climate Change

What:

Strengthen zoning rules in Local Development Plans (LDPs) to give real protection to sensitive areas like the Sperrins and peatlands. Ensure consistent application of zones and full environmental assessments.

Why:

Current zones are too weak. Important areas are being developed despite protections like Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs).

Without stronger rules, harmful development like illegal quarrying and peatland destruction will continue.

What:

Make planning a central tool for tackling climate change and promoting sustainability, especially in sensitive areas like the Foyle and Faughan flood plains and Sperrins AONB. Strengthen protections through local plans and management strategies.

Why:

Planning decisions have a big impact on the environment. Areas like the Sperrins may be designated as protected but often have little real protection.

Planners need to listen to local people and put climate and nature at the heart of decisions.

Energy ⚡

Wind farms in the right place

What:

Onshore wind farms, especially in sensitive areas like the Sperrins Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), are not always a fair or sustainable alternative to fossil fuels.

The full environmental cost of producing and installing turbines must be considered alongside with a full understanding of the tradeoffs involved so that the move to renewables is encouraged.

Why:

The Sperrins AONB must be protected. Communities living near wind turbines are often overlooked, despite the potential impacts on their physical and mental health, well-being, and quality of life. There are also concerns about biodiversity and the economic impact, such as falling house values.

Proper investigations into these effects are urgently needed to ensure any transition to renewables is truly just and sustainable for both people and nature.

Energy ⚡

Support informed decision making around wind energy infrastructure

What:

Improve public awareness and education around the operation and limitations of wind energy infrastructure, particularly in areas like the Sperrins AONB.

There needs to be greater transparency, informed debate, and a fairer distribution of infrastructure.

Why:

There is currently a low level of public understanding about the realities of wind turbine operation. This lack of transparency undermines public trust and engagement.

In the context of the Sperrins AONB, where protected zones are limited, it is particularly important that any renewable energy developments are matched with clear communication and responsible energy use. Protecting the AONB while ensuring local people understand and benefit from renewable energy is essential for a fair and sustainable energy transition.

Energy ⚡

Help people to retrofit their homes and public buildings for energy efficiency

What:

Everyone should be able to get grants or support to improve their homes so they use less energy and rely more on clean energy.

People should be encouraged to use small-scale renewable energy like solar panels. All new homes, whether private or public, should be built to high energy-efficiency standards, like passive houses, and should include things like heat pumps or geothermal systems. Government and community buildings should lead the way and meet these standards too.

Why:

Homes need to be warm, affordable to run, and not dependent on fossil fuels.

While solar panels help, we need to go further, especially with new buildings. They should be built in a way that keeps heat in and uses clean energy from the start. Government and public buildings should set an example. Making sure support is available to everyone will help ensure that no one is left behind as we move to a greener, fairer energy system.

Energy ⚡

Reduce Energy Waste

What:

Make sure public lighting is used in the right places, at the right times. For example, avoid leaving lights like floodlights on all day when they're not needed—especially on holidays when buildings are closed.

At the same time, make sure street lighting is on in places where it helps people feel safe, especially at night.

Why:

Leaving lights on when they're not needed wastes energy and money. People should know why certain lights are on and who is paying for them.

On the other hand, good lighting is important for community safety—especially for people walking at night, including women. Lighting decisions should balance energy use with public safety, and be open and transparent.

Energy

More transparency and regulation of Data Centres

What:

Require councils to ensure that planning decisions about new data centres are aligned with climate legislation, and full transparency should be required regarding the ownership, energy sources, and emissions of data centres.

Why:

Data centres are major energy consumers, and while they are often marketed as powered by renewable energy, many still rely heavily on fossil fuels—for example, in the Republic of Ireland, around 50% of their energy comes from gas.

Despite this, planning approvals are frequently granted by Councils without sufficient scrutiny of carbon impact or alignment with climate targets. There is also a lack of transparency around who is behind these developments, and widespread concerns about greenwashing. To ensure climate commitments are upheld and public trust is maintained, it is essential to increase awareness of the true environmental impact of data centres and ensure that planning decisions are informed, transparent, and accountable, as well as being consistent with the Climate Act, subject to departmental oversight, and in some cases, that decisions are called in by the department of infrastructure.

Transport

Tackle Congestion at Key Traffic Points

What:

Fix traffic choke points like the A6 by improving and subsidising public transport and managing car parking to encourage people to leave the car at home.

Why:

Congestion causes pollution, wastes time, and slows down business. It also poses a significant public health risk, as well as discouraging active travel because no-one wants to walk or cycle in dirty air. Better public transport is a key part of the solution.

Biodiversity

Stop the Use of Herbicides on Roads

What:

Stop using harmful herbicides on roadsides and find natural alternatives to manage weeds. Recognise and address invasive species as part of this approach.

Why:

Herbicides damage local ecosystems and biodiversity and harm human health.

By promoting natural solutions and educating the public and contractors, we can support biodiversity and make better environmental choices.

Biodiversity

Ensure Green Space Provision in New Housing Developments

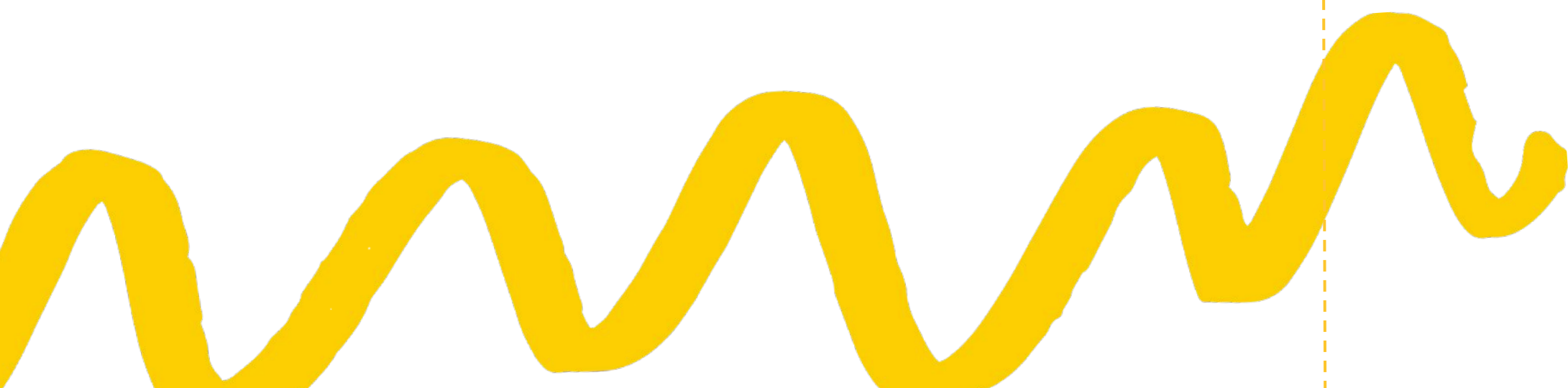
What:

Ensure that new housing developments include accessible green spaces.

These spaces provide health benefits and help mitigate flooding risks, while supporting biodiversity.

Why:

Access to green spaces is vital for health and well-being. Including those in new developments also helps protect biodiversity and manage environmental issues like flooding.



Biodiversity

Prevent the Destruction of Peatlands

What:

Stop the destruction of peatlands from extraction, development, and recreational use. Create a restoration plan and strategy for peatlands in the DCSDC area.

Why:

Peatlands are a critical carbon sink, home to rare plant species and endangered birds. They also play a vital role in water quality, including drinking water. We need a plan to protect and restore them before they are lost.

Biodiversity

Support Pollinators and Reduce Harmful Practices

What:

Encourage native pollinator species by reducing the use of pesticides and herbicides, limiting unnecessary hedge and verge cutting, and increasing native tree and shrub planting. Educate the public on the importance of pollinators and change attitudes towards garden maintenance.

Why:

Pollinators are essential to our survival and the health of our ecosystems. By supporting them, we improve biodiversity, benefit from green spaces, and promote healthier environments for people and wildlife.

Environmental Protection

Address farming practices that harm the environment

What:

Address the ways in which agricultural practices are harming the environment and biodiversity and support farmers to farm in more nature-friendly ways.

Why:

Intensive farming is destroying nature and Northern Ireland is a sacrifice zone.

Environmental Protection

Establish an independent EPA

What:

A body independent of government with the power to enforce robust standards of environmental protection, backed up with scientific evidence.

Why:

There is no system at the moment to punish polluters and we can see the consequences of this in Lough Neagh and Muboy (for example).



Environmental Protection

Joined up environmental protection across the island of Ireland

What:

Shared standards and information on an all-island basis, ensuring that data is compatible and comparable.

Why:

Harm to the environment anywhere affects everything around it and doesn't recognise borders.

Environmental Protection

More prosecution for environmental crimes

What:

Real accountability for those who harm the environment.

Why:

The responsibility for environmental harms lies with big corporations and the government, not solely with individuals.



Housing

Make better use of existing housing stock

Housing

Introduce rent control

What:

Available housing should be suited to its use and new solutions found to bring more under-used and unused homes into use.

These could include restricting AirBnb, new approaches to housing design to make homes more adaptable through people's life times, sanctions for dereliction, and creating a culture of sharing homes.

Why:

Housing shortages affect everything because housing is essential for community, security and stability, and family life.

What:

New legislation to cap how much rent landlords can charge.

Why:

To make the housing system fairer and more affordable, and to enable communities to form by helping people stay in one place longer and put down roots.



Housing

Update building codes to reflect environmental standards

What:

Better rules, guidance, and support for environmentally friendly buildings.

Why:

To ensure that new and renovated buildings are fit for the future.

It has been a well planned way of working and the way you were able to take on-board a request to widen the scope really helped people to stay engaged.

I'm really enjoying the experience and getting to meet a lot of interesting people.

One of the participants.



Participant experience and insights

Without participants, none of this process would be possible.

We sent surveys to our participants at the end of the first event, after the second event and then at the end. A summary is on the next page, with full details found in [Appendix 3](#).





Participant experience and insights

Awareness and Understanding

Pre: High concern about climate change but mixed awareness of council actions.

Mid: Slight increase in understanding of issues faced by other areas; greater sense of agency.

Post: Still high concern but awareness of council action remained limited.

Feelings about the Process

Pre: Hopeful, curious, but uncertain about impact.

Mid: More positive and empowered, valuing inclusion and exchange of ideas.

Post: Mixed emotions — some felt heard and hopeful, others disillusioned and frustrated at lack of visible follow-through.

Hoped-for Impact

Pre: Broad aspirations for cleaner environment, better services, and community inclusion.

Mid: Greater focus on influencing policy and ensuring urgent action.

Post: Desire for tangible, implemented changes and accountability from decision makers.



Overall, participants began with optimism and curiosity, grew more engaged and empowered mid-way, but ended with a split between renewed determination and concern – highlighting the importance of visible action to maintain trust.

If this process is to have any long-term value, then these conversations must lead to transparent action, honest representation, and respect for the voices of those living with these directly.

Anything less risks eroding public trust in the very climate policies we need people to support.

One of the participants



We, as people and communities, are deeply connected to the land culturally, emotionally, and practically.

That connection is being broken, and it's destroying what were once thriving rural communities.

This engagement process must lead to change that restores trust, protects our rights, and honours the landscapes we depend on.

One of the participants



Our reflections

Focus on community benefits first.

Climate conversations rooted in what people care about work better than starting with climate jargon or technical goals.

Support everyday residents to become community climate champions. When people feel they're contributing to their communities, they engage with real commitment.

Creating meaningful roles for residents.

Residents bring their own expertise to the table, create roles for them that draws on this expertise, and make sure to communicate how their ideas are contributing to real change.

Partnership is key. When communities and policy-makers co-create solutions, the results are more impactful, actionable, and trusted.



Our reflections

Challenges

Recruitment was difficult, particularly outside Derry City where existing civic networks are strong. Despite a wide call-out, most initial interest came from already engaged urban groups.

Another challenge was the wide range of climate knowledge among Conversation Starters - from those new to the topic to others already active in local climate advocacy. This diversity brought valuable insights and real-world experience to the discussions, which some participants found helpful and enlightening. However, it also led to imbalances at times, with more experienced voices naturally shaping the focus of conversations, which people who had less experience or knowledge occasionally found challenging to engage with.

In-Project Solutions

We addressed the recruitment challenges through paid social media adverts and targeted on-street recruitment in underrepresented areas

We framed discussions around shared values to support inclusive group dynamics, even with differing levels of information. However, some participants felt their strong views - especially on issues impacting certain communities more than on others - weren't fully reflected. We recognise that our council-wide focus couldn't capture these nuances and encourage decision makers to continue engaging directly with affected communities to address unequal impacts of climate action.

Lessons Learned

There is value in exploring areas of disagreement more deeply. Next time we would allow more time to 'sit with the trouble' and resist converging on ideas too quickly.



I was very impressed by the passion shown by the few people who expressed real-life concerns about the AONB (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) issues they brought to the process, I would not have been aware of these before.

The process was a new experience for me and I really enjoyed meeting the very diverse group and hearing all the views - I came away enlightened after every session.

The team were brilliant at keeping us working while still ensuring everyone had the opportunity to make a contribution.

One of the participants

Net Zero Living programme

This project was funded by Innovate UK as part of the [Net Zero Living](#) programme which aims to help regional authorities accelerate the transition to net zero.

Involve, Forum for the Future, Ipsos and Quantum Strategy & Technology were appointed to support 25 'Fast Follower' local authorities with their work on **visioning and citizen engagement**.

Around a third of the UK's carbon emissions are dependent on sectors that are directly shaped or influenced by local authority practice, policy or partnerships. Many of the technological solutions needed to move places to net zero already exist, but local authorities face many challenges and barriers when trying to deliver these solutions at the scale needed.

The cohort of 52 funded places across the UK are delivering projects to overcome the non technological barriers to delivering net zero in a place.



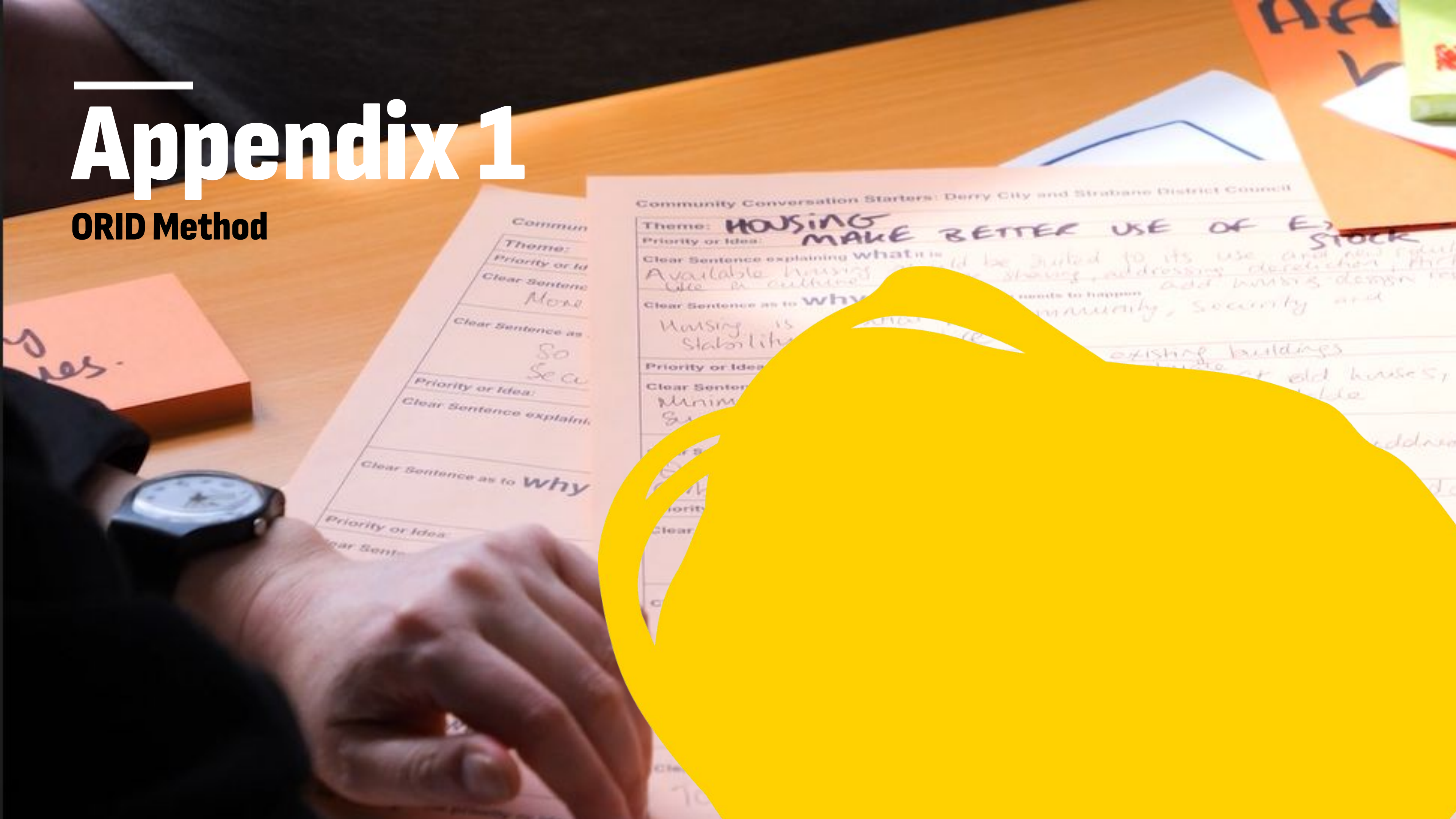
Council Community Conversation



Derry City and Strabane District

Appendix 1

ORID Method





What is ORID?

ORID is a structured method used to guide meaningful conversations. It helps people reflect, share, and make sense of a topic by moving through four levels of thinking:

O – Objective:

What do we see, hear, or know about this topic?

→ What is a conversation? What makes one good or bad? Can you recall a recent one that stood out? What was said?

R – Reflective:

How do we feel about it? What are our emotional responses?

→ What does it feel like when a conversation flows well—or when it doesn't?

I – Interpretive:

What meaning do we make from this? What insights can we draw?

→ What helps conversations go well? What gets in the way? What are the benefits of a great conversation?

D – Decisional:

What action can we take? What should happen next?

→ What are the key ingredients of a good conversation? What needs to be in place?

In this session, participants used ORID to explore their own experiences, then shared one key "ingredient" of a good conversation on a post-it. These were gathered into a group resource to guide future conversations.

Appendix 2

De-prioritised ideas



**Ideas
considered
low impact,
and easy to
do.**

↓ Low impact
✓ Easy to do



Transport

Introduce a Night-Time Bus Service

What:

Provide a night bus in the city to make it easier and safer to get around after dark.

Why:

A night bus would support people working or going out in the evening, help the local economy, improve safety, and reduce the need to use cars.

Transport

Improve Cycling Infrastructure

What:

Build safe dedicated cycle lanes from the suburbs into the city and provide secure places to park bikes.

Why:

Cycling helps reduce pollution and traffic, supports better health, and gives people a real alternative to using the car.

Biodiversity



Support Reforestation
and Woodland Growth

Waste



Transparency on where
public litter goes

What:

Increase native woodland across Northern Ireland and Ireland as a whole. Focus on planting smaller woodlands in addition to large forestry plantations and commit to maintaining these areas long-term.

Why:

Woodlands are crucial for both people and nature.

Expanding and caring for them helps restore ecosystems and provides long-lasting environmental benefits.

What:

It is not very clear where our rubbish goes and how it's being recycled.

Why:

We heard messages that many want to know where our recycling is going: we want transparency and accountability.

We heard that the lack of information is leading to apathy because people think that even separated waste ends up in the same place.

We think bigger organisations need to take responsibility and be transparent. We think large organisations, companies, and restaurants should be accountable for food waste. Individual efforts are being undermined by lack of knowledge and lack of transparency.

Waste

Stricter enforcement on litter from cars and fly tipping

What:

Litter is being thrown out of cars and left on slip roads and roadsides in the countryside, and in back lanes in towns and cities.

Why:

This is a big issue that needs to be addressed to keep vermin away, support mental well-being, pride in our communities, safer areas and a good impression of our local areas. There is a lack of signage in these areas and information campaigns on this. We think there should be more enforcement.

Waste

More public bins

What:

There are not enough public bins and they don't always support recycling.

Why:

It should be the same rule for the street as it is the home: many public bins do not allow splitting of waste. We think there should be fines for putting things in the wrong bins, with more information shared on what is right to recycle. (see idea 2).

 Low impact
 Easy to do

Waste



Make waste disposal more accessible

What:

Amenity centres aren't always accessible or welcoming (for example, they are often littered with old nails and broken glass, they use high-sided skips making it hard to dispose of bulkier items) and this is a big barrier to recycling for many people.

Why:

We want to encourage people to recycle, and that means having no barriers to recycling.

We have heard that information regarding amenity centres is inaccurate, especially on opening times.

We've heard the centres themselves aren't accessible and not often kept tidy/safe.

We also heard that those without cars have struggled to bring larger items to these centres and wondered if a neighbourhood recycling scheme, larger specific bins in public areas, could be put around the district.



**Ideas
considered
low impact,
and hard to
do.**

↓ Low impact
✏ Harder to do



Transport

Use Smaller Buses on Less Busy Routes

What:

Use smaller buses where large double-deckers aren't needed.

Why:

Big buses aren't always efficient. Using the right size of vehicle helps reduce pollution and running costs, and can provide a more flexible and accessible service.

Transport

Offer E-Bikes and Scooters for Public Use

What:

Make e-bikes and scooters available for people to rent or borrow in the city.

Why:

This gives people more sustainable and flexible travel options, helps reduce congestion, and makes better use of bike lanes and other infrastructure.

Housing

More rights for tenants

Waste

Address dog fouling

 Low impact
 Harder to do

What:

Better conditions and more secure tenures for renters in the private rental sector.

Why:

So that you don't have to buy a house to have secure housing.

What:

It is unclear if there are deterrents and who is really monitoring dog fouling.

Why:

There is a lack of knowledge on if this is really being monitored or enforced. A solution could be to offer bags near bins so there was no excuse for people, as well as creating designated dog parks, but everyone agreed that the lack of information on what is being done is leading to upset.

Appendix 3

Participant survey responses





Pre-engagement questionnaire

Early in the engagement process, participants were asked **how worried they were about climate change**.

Four were slightly worried, thirteen were very worried and one replied that they didn't know.

When participants were asked if they understood the **purpose of the project**, twelve said they strongly agreed, while six responded 'tend to agree'

When asked: To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? [I know what my local authority is doing to combat climate change/meet net zero]

Nine answered they neither agreed or disagreed, two strongly agreed, one strongly disagreed and six said they tend to agree.

Response rate:

Pre-engagement: 18 responses

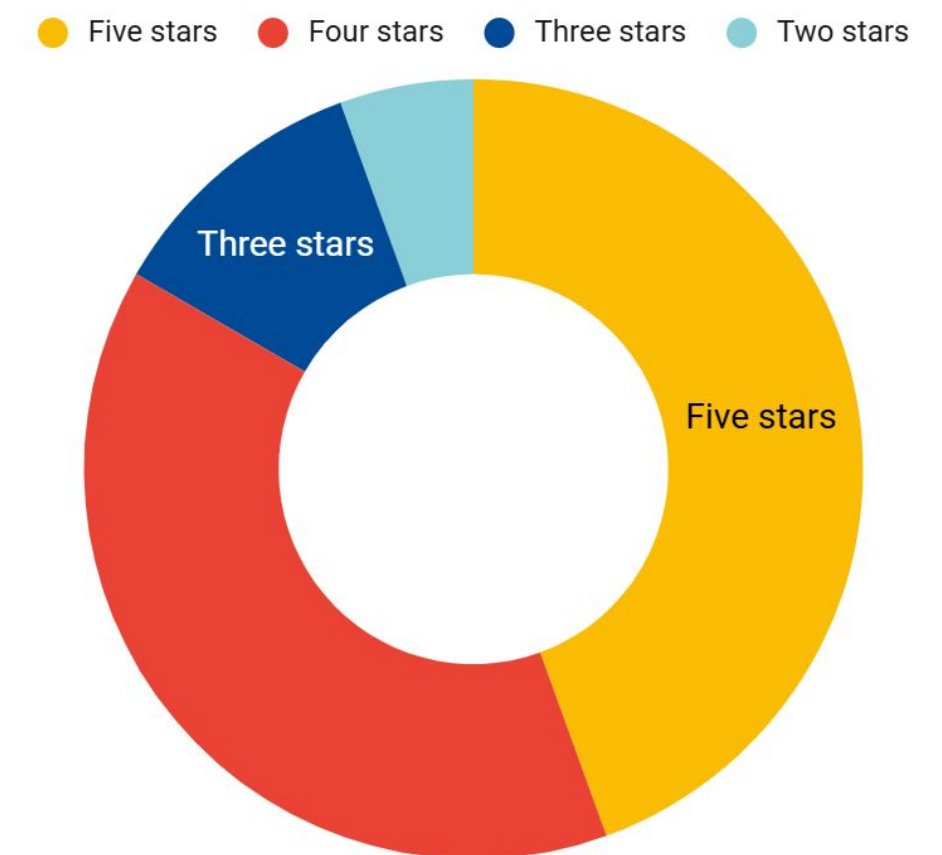
Mid-engagement: 7 responses

Post-engagement: 12 responses

¹Source: Ipsos Political Monitor, July 2023

This is in comparison to the wider public where 69% of people say they are 'very' or 'slightly' concerned.¹ about climate change.

In general, the participants rated the sessions highly, with the majority giving it five stars.





Pre-engagement questionnaire

When asked about how they felt about the engagement process they were taking part in, they said:

[looking forward to] learning something new, meeting people, challenging myself

Hopeful that all our feedback will be considered.

Very uncertain.

*Confident I will deliver what is required from me. Slightly time-pressured for the next stage.
Apprehensive if this will actually make a difference*

Awkward work wise having physical conversations due to availability but working round it :)

“ ”

When asked how confident they felt about their contributions being used by local decision makers, their answers were more mixed.

● Neither agree or disagree ● Strongly agree
● Tend to agree



Pre-engagement questionnaire

When asked about the **impacts** they hoped the process would have:

For themselves/household

I was hoping to make my ideas /vision clear as part of the engagement but any impact is going to be minimal as far as I can see in terms of individual /community also most of the councils focus appears to be on the city.

As an individual any impact I will have is minimal because what I've been doing to date is not going to change.

Not sure.

A better understanding so I can make changes

I hope to see that the public view is listened to and taken on board.

“ ”



Better personal understanding of what is being done.

Promise to help rural areas



Pre-engagement questionnaire

When asked about the **impacts** they hoped the process would have:

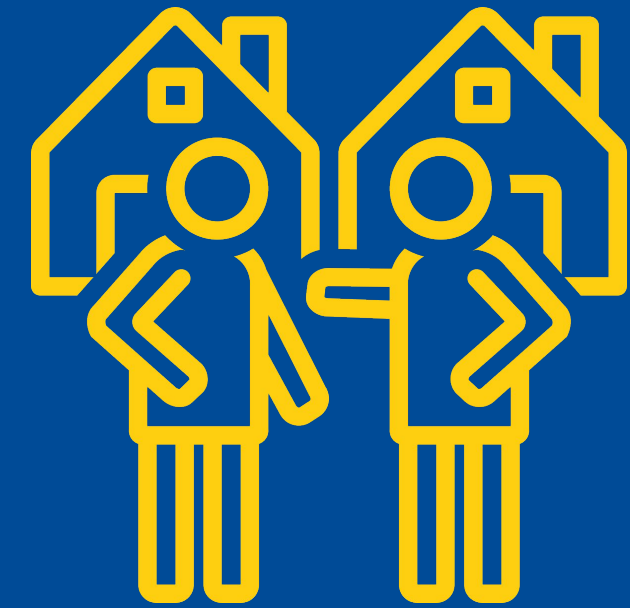
In the local area:

I hope the interviews will help people to think about and focus more on climate change, its effects and what they as individuals can do.

A cleaner environment; less litter; cleaner air; helping wildlife; encouraging other people more aware of climate change and taking responsibility for their actions.

Council taking action on the elements that concern me. le flooding solutions on roads Gritting. Recycling education. Better transport infrastructure. Reduce litter, better transport options, focus on renewable energy

“ ”



I honestly don't know

More understanding if how we can engage more on climate change.





Mid-engagement questionnaire

Response rate:

Pre-engagement: 18 responses

Mid-engagement: 7 responses

Post-engagement: 12 responses

Participants were asked again half-way through **how worried they were about climate change**. All respondents replied 'very worried'.

When participants were asked if they understood the **purpose of the project**, three now said they strongly agreed, one strongly disagreed and while three responded 'tend to agree'

When asked: To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? **[I know what my local authority is doing to combat climate change/meet net zero]**

Two answered they neither agreed or disagreed, three said they tend to agree, and three said they tend to disagree.





Mid-engagement questionnaire

“ ”

When asked about how they felt about the engagement process they were taking part in, they said:

Empowered, committed, interested in the results.

Positive.

I'm doing something worthwhile.

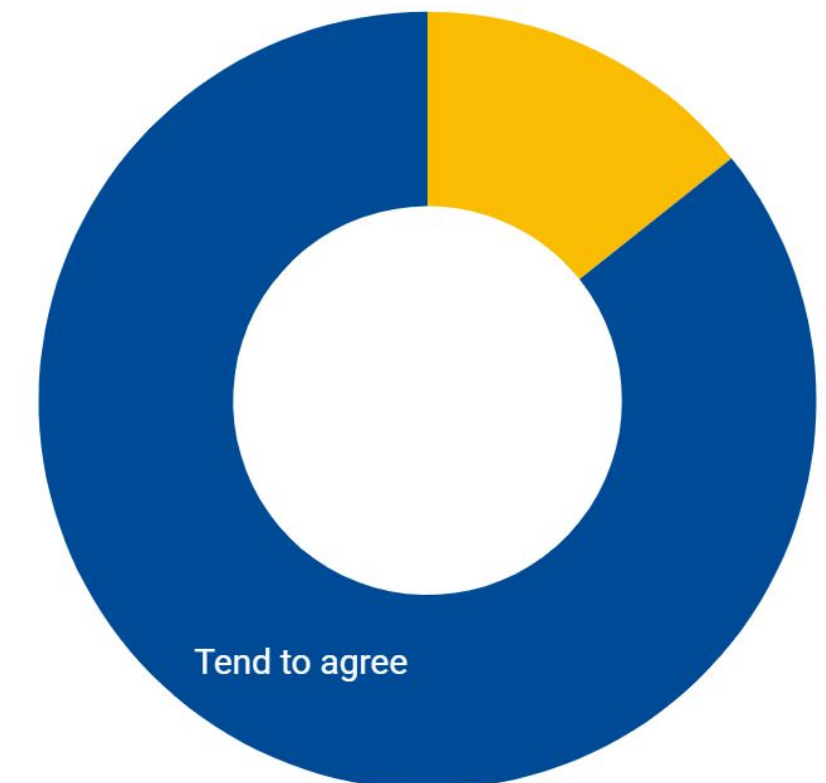
More knowledgeable in regards to the issues faced by other areas.

It has been a well planned way of working and the way you were able to take on-board a request to widen the scope really helped people to stay engaged. I'm really enjoying the experience and getting to meet a lot of interesting people.

I think it's quite exciting. I feel quite privileged to be a part of this process. I hope the very strong and sincere concerns people have are acted upon and respected. I look forward to seeing these reflected in council policy and actions.

When asked how confident they felt about their contributions being used by local decision makers, their answers were tentatively

● Neither agree or disagree ● Tend to agree





Mid-engagement questionnaire

When asked about the impacts they hoped the process would make:

For themselves/household

I would hope that my voice /our voices are heard in some small way as climate change and it's affect on the bio diversity is really very important change is happening all species are suffering both here and across the world government policies are having very negative effects on our small province so to have a day is very important.

Be an advocate to minimize all the the household members impact on the environment

To show my daughter that ordinary people are listened to.

*Sense of engagement.
Agency.*

“ ”

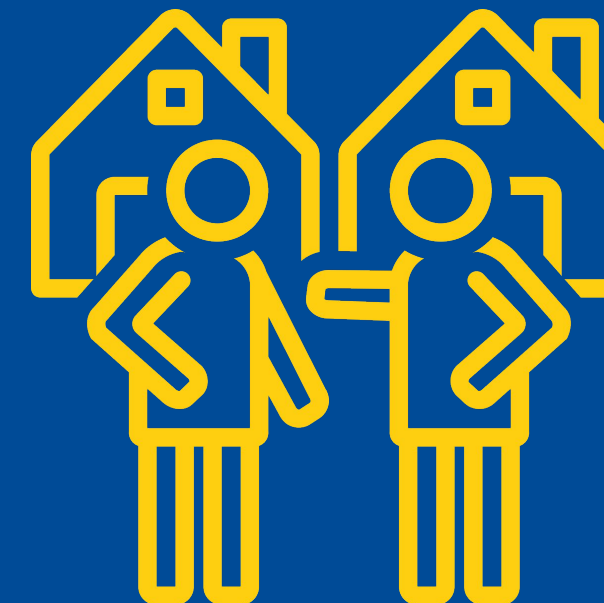


More awareness about what should happen and ways to bring others along with the changes that need to happen urgently

To make more changes.

Mid-engagement questionnaire

“ ”



When asked about the impacts they hoped the process would make:

In the local area:

That the people with the power can implement/respond to the concerns as a result of the conversations

Less money wasted on unnecessary things that are merely cosmetic in nature.

Greater consideration given to wildlife. No pesticides herbicides. Real protection for wildlife and not just lip service. Punitive action taken where necessary ie for dumping, littering; spoiling habitats or polluting rivers.

A commitment to cleaner public transport and incentives for people to get out of their cars. Grants to help people do this.. Follow EU and Ireland's example in relation to meeting climate commitments.
"

I would hope that many of the comments made by our conversations will inform the policy makers at council level and above so positive change can come about





Post-engagement questionnaire

Response rate:

Pre-engagement: 18 responses

Mid-engagement: 7 responses

Post-engagement: 12 responses

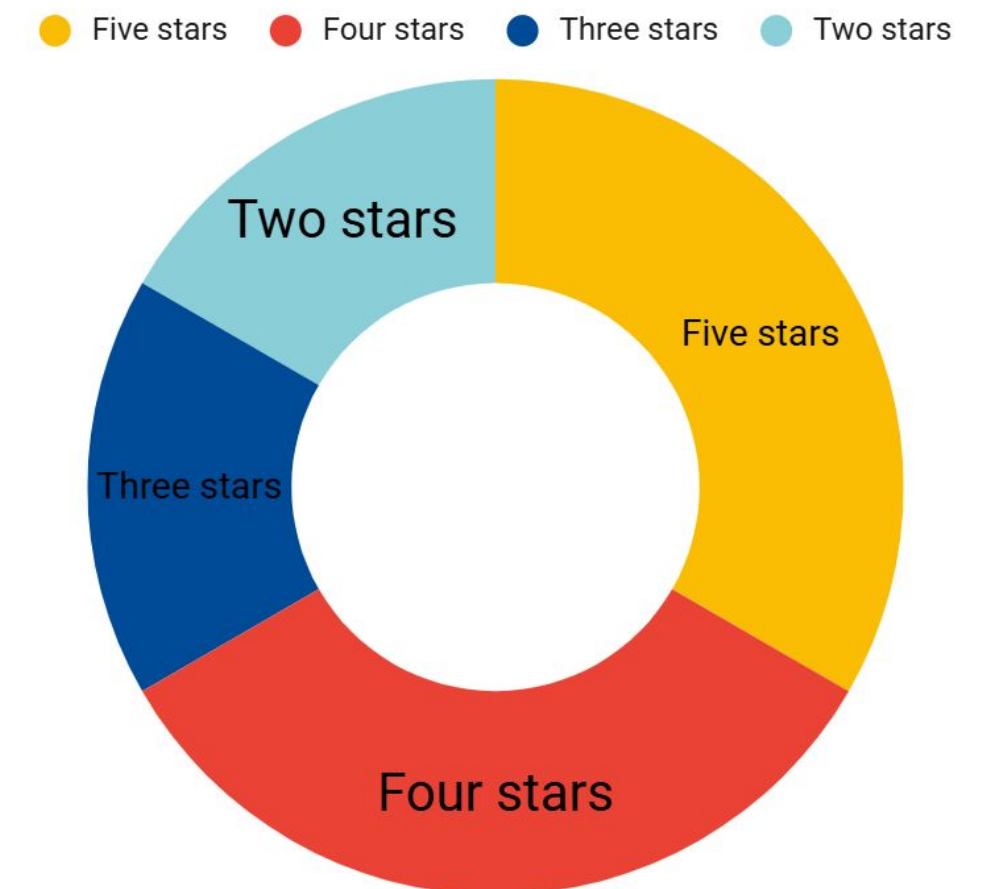
Participants were asked again about **how worried they were about climate change**. One answered slightly worried, eleven answered very worried.

When participants were asked if they understood the **purpose of the project**, one answered neither agree or disagree, eight answered strongly agreed and three answered tend to agree.

When asked: To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? **[I know what my local authority is doing to combat climate change/meet net zero]**

Seven answered they neither agreed or disagreed, three said they tend to agree.

The last session with the decision makers varied the most in terms of ratings.





Post-engagement questionnaire

“ ”

When asked about how they felt about the engagement process they were taking part in, they said:

I feel indecisive, disillusioned but hopeful for change ...listened to and my input was useful

Disappointed and not very hopeful.

Positive and hopeful see it more as a starting point than an end.

Engaged, exhausted at the end, exasperated that the biggest polluters not held to account

I feel disappointed, unheard, and frustrated. Especially after seeing some of our community's key concerns misrepresented or diluted in the final summaries.

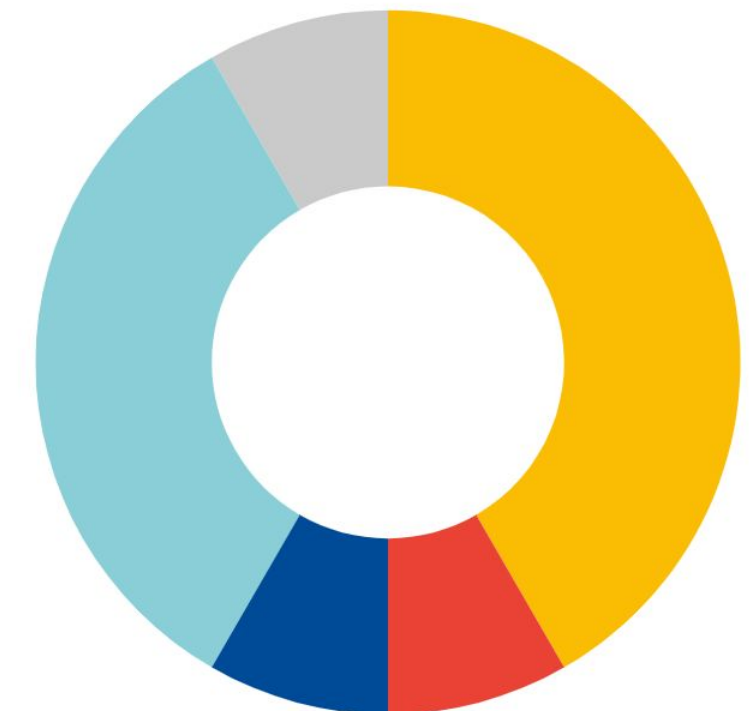
I feel hopeful in most regards but also, given the departments who didn't appear to feel it necessary to send representation I feel that the likes of housing will only pay lip service to our input.

Privileged, hopeful responsible

Empowered, optimistic, heard

When asked how confident they felt about their contributions being used by local decision makers, their answers are illustrated below. This had the most variation, with more negative responses.

● Neither agree or disagree ● Strongly agree
● Strongly disagree ● Tend to agree ● Tend to disagree



Post-engagement questionnaire

When asked about the impacts they hoped the process would make:

For themselves/household

My position hasn't changed.

As part of my work i aspire to implement projects that puts nature at the centre of all that i do. our projects support pollinators, planting trees, growing our own food, herbs and flowers which supports biodiversity reducing our carbon footprint.

I do however want to preserve rain water and currently moving this within my next project. we carry out no dig methods are organic and pesticide free and working towards sustainability that supports climate change.

Action from all concerned

Awareness of the process will help improve positive outlooks and outcomes.

Tangible changes that I can commit to . That it makes it easier to recycle, travel and contribute to lessening our carbon footprint.

“ ”



Change in attitude when it comes to any decision on buying goods or services about the impact on our local environment and how I can mitigate any negative impact by making different decisions

More informed choices



Post-engagement questionnaire

When asked about the **impacts** they hoped the process would make:

In the local area:

Ideas being implemented as per our ideas – such as protection and increase of green areas, traffic/transport solutions and improved cycle/alternative transport opportunities.

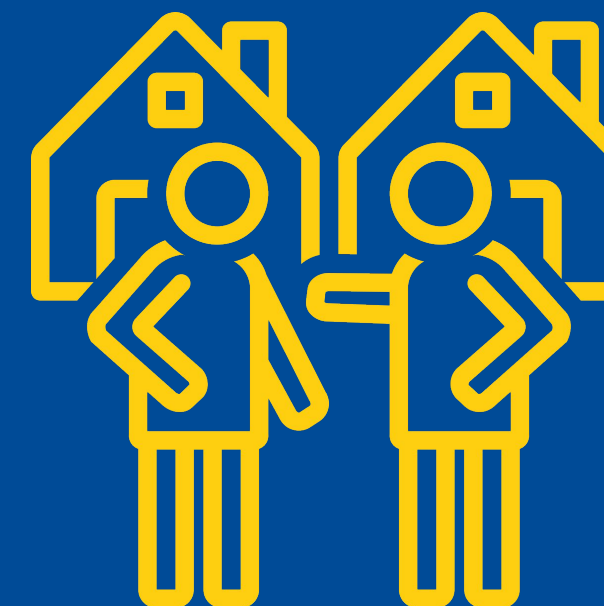
Better options for active travel, reduce litter, more use of green energy.

Addressing issues in AONB and biodiversity. Address issues around air quality and pollution Public education and involvement. That those in government local and national will seriously address the issues and not just pay lip service.

That relevant responsible bodies follow up and respond with many of the project priorities

Improved engagement, understanding about what can be done and what is being done by the council and how that can help individuals communities take positive action.

“ ”



We, as people and communities, are deeply connected to the land culturally, emotionally, and practically. That connection is being broken, and it's destroying what were once thriving rural communities.

This engagement process must lead to change that restores trust, protects our rights, and honours the landscapes we depend on.

The very last untouched areas in the Sperrins and indeed in Northern Ireland, are now being exploited for monetary gain. This must stop if we are serious about climate justice, biodiversity protection, and rural wellbeing.



Written by Rebekah McCabe and Marianna Mooney
from Involve, August 2025.

Involve are the UK's public participation charity, with
a mission to put people at the heart of decision making.

www.involve.org.uk

**For more information on Derry & Strabane
Sustainability & Climate Commission please
contact: michele.murphy@derrystrabane.com**



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