

CONGRESS DISCUSSION SESSION: NOTES

I thought it would be helpful to summarise some of the key points I noted from the discussion session at Congress, only a few of which are included in my report.

- We tend to make too many assumptions about where people are: some are at the start of the process of reducing their carbon footprint, a few are much more further on, so need to address people at different levels. It's important to find out where people are before we begin work. Government only legislated on smoking ban once it was pretty confident that most people would accept it. We don't even really know where our memberships are on these issues – and they are likely to be more committed than most.
- People can be at different positions on different issues: one individual might make good progress on heating, say, but not even consider the energy footprint of clothing or food.
- Personal carbon allowances are one potential way to rationalise this: they provide a mechanism to cope with that range of issues, under the control of the individual. Could we do a shadow carbon rationing system to demonstrate to politicians that it can work? (The Royal Society of Arts is apparently doing some work on this).
- The Gavin Hasting's "Walk about a Bit" Campaign a few years ago had a high penetration, people understood the message, but it didn't succeed in changing public opinion. We have to be very sophisticated about how to get the right message to the right people.
- Every organisation in LINK should be encouraged to have a travel plan. Sustrans now has programme called TravelSmart, aimed at changing travel behaviour through individual travel marketing. LINK needs to consider its own behaviour: there was no attempt to encourage car-sharing to Congress, and no record of train/bus timetables to get to the event, although Birnham was chosen because of its good rail access from north and south. The event started between two trains from the south, so attendees could only arrive too early or too late. Every event should have a travel plan: it takes a bit of time, but can be done. Sustrans also has booklet about low carbon travel which might be helpful to Member Bodies.
- It is important to make pleas about climate change from the perspective of the customer. We should format our comments along the lines of : "it's difficult for all of us to find a sustainable option, but here's some advice on how you might be able to reduce your personal carbon footprint". Similarly, the message shouldn't be "don't fly" (imposed from the outside) but "why fly?" (inviting self-assessment).
- As one example of the problems to be address, it was noted that car sharing has become increasingly difficult as nodal points on motorways have started limiting parking to 2 hours, so financial incentives are moving away from carbon reduction.
- It needs organisational flexibility to cope with these ideas: travel plans might work better with flexible working hours, so people can travel on cheaper, less busy trains and buses.
- It is important to make clear what the scientific consensus is. Science is never unequivocal and there are remaining areas of doubt, but this doubt now focuses

primarily on the *degree* and *speed* of change not the threat of change. Predictions cannot be made with certainty, only based on probability.

- One delegate asked: Are we ready to take on the public here? Shouldn't our audience be the politicians? Many of the policy asks need to be delivered by government, some by business, only a few by the public: delivering government policy changes are what LINK is good at. Another delegate pointed out that we are proposing going into a field of social marketing, with which we are not very familiar and have little expertise. We need to consider what actual things LINK members can do to make a significant change???
- We don't need to talk to *all* of the public, which would be extremely expensive. This is about threading into audiences we are already communicating with. We need to start with an organisation, and its community and then build a network from there. There are plenty of best-practice examples from which we can draw, particularly within the health service, such as the 'See Me' Campaign, which was reckoned to be a huge success.
- We need to challenge the small groups that seem to have a lot of political influence, eg Chambers of Commerce, who may not represent a very large spectrum of public opinion compared to the likes of LINK.
- We need to map what we're best at, with respect to climate communication, then share experience, resources, even supporters to take this forward.
- We are going to need help on social marketing, but there are experts there that can help us.
- Currently there is a social cache to outrageous consumption, and that is something we need to try to help challenge. The world is not going to change unless people like us make a lot more effort to change it than we do at present. The message should be that consumption isn't the same as wellbeing. However, how far are we prepared to go as organisations in challenging the consumerism ethos, since this is a key element of the debate?
- Engaging in a different agenda can be dangerous for any organisation. We need to ensure that we link climate change work into core agendas, be quite sophisticated in our approach, and engage trustees in these discussions.
- The inappropriate policy of dumping wind factories on local communities has alienated local communities to approaches to climate change, and we need to attack that issue head-on.
- Must remember that the Scottish Government is the government; they got themselves elected on basis of handling society-wide problems that individuals cannot solve themselves. Mustn't let them off the hook: this is their problem, and we look to them to solve it. However, we can offer to help them, which might be where funding issues might be solved.
- Don't we need to look for cross-party support on this issue, so that all parties can move in the same direction? At present, the political *zeitgeist* is probably going in the other direction, like all the parties competing to remove Forth bridge tolls at the last election! However, even if we understand the position they are in, we should also harass them relentlessly on the Climate Change Bill.
- There is a political window of opportunity now, but it may well be short-lived.

- We are talking about actual changes in behaviour which will be uncomfortable for many individuals. Stopping smoking was also uncomfortable for many people, but it was legislation that drove many people to give up. We should look at how political perceptions changed enough for this legislation to be introduced. That worked because it made the right thing (not smoking) the easier choice for people. The smoking ban happened because Ministers were told that the moment had come when the balance of the political drift was in favour of the smoking ban, so it was all the work on shifting public opinion that made the eventual legislation possible. The analogies for climate change are therefore clear. It wasn't actually leadership from Ministers, although they are happy to take the credit: their mandate comes from the public.
- We should think about what single iconic thing we should be pushing for to address the issue of climate change. We should have an answer to that if Ministers ask: would a simple message like 'slow down' work?
- What does a affordable, low carbon, high-quality lifestyle look like? We need to clarify our issues on that as part of this process.
- We need to ensure that we work with Stop Climate Chaos, without competing, especially as there is so much overlap of membership. Stop Climate Change is broader, involving faith groups, health groups etc, but they are waiting for people like LINK to give leadership.