



People powering the green transition

Delivering on the opportunity of the public
participation strategy

August 2025

About The Young Foundation

The Young Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation driving community research and social innovation. We bring communities, organisations and policymakers together to understand the issues people care about and support collective action to improve lives. We involve communities in research and innovate together to inspire positive change. We deliver distinctive initiatives and programmes to shape a fairer future. We also power the Institute for Community Studies.

For more information visit us at: www.youngfoundation.org

About Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach is a team of social scientists and communication specialists working to widen and deepen public engagement with climate change. Through our research, practical guides and consultancy services, our charity helps organisations communicate about climate change in ways that resonate with the values of their audiences. We have 15 years' experience working with a wide range of international partners including central, regional and local governments, international bodies, academic institutions, charities, businesses, faith organisations and youth groups.

For more information visit us at: www.climateoutreach.org



Introduction

The climate emergency is one of the biggest challenges of our time. Both urgent and complex, it requires the participation of every sector, and, most importantly, of people in their daily lives. There is no shortage of exciting initiatives, projects, networks and campaigns driving change. However, the challenge remains how we collectively take what we know, and what is working in practice, to help us all make the transition to a greener and more prosperous future.

The public participation strategy to be published by the Department for Security, Energy and Net Zero (DESNZ) in 2025 is a huge step forward in articulating and harnessing the change needed to shape a greener future. It has the potential to build on the wealth of work happening across sectors, and the rich insight derived from it, ensuring we can truly put people at the heart of tackling climate change and creating a fairer and more sustainable future.

This short briefing summarises how DESNZ can incorporate the wealth of great work already happening and build on it in the delivery of their strategy.

Summary

On 24 June, Climate Outreach and The Young Foundation, in partnership with the Joined-Up Sustainability Transformations (JUST) Centre, brought together a rich group of more than 100 stakeholders from academia, civil society, media and members of the public to think about public participation in the green transition. Two inspiring panels invited participants to learn from success and work in partnership. Two interactive sessions were hosted, capturing the insights of participants on what is already working when it comes to public participation, what resources might be needed to build on this, and what each organisation that was in the room might contribute towards the strategy. The day ended with a thought-provoking conversation between COP29 Youth Delegate Samia Dumbaya and Minister for Climate Kerry McCarthy.

Emerging insights

The event highlighted the wealth of resources that are already in place for the delivery of public participation, and the potential role of DESNZ and the upcoming public participation strategy in articulating and platforming the good work that is already happening. A selection of brief case studies are here , with more available in Climate Outreach's [latest report](#).

SONI

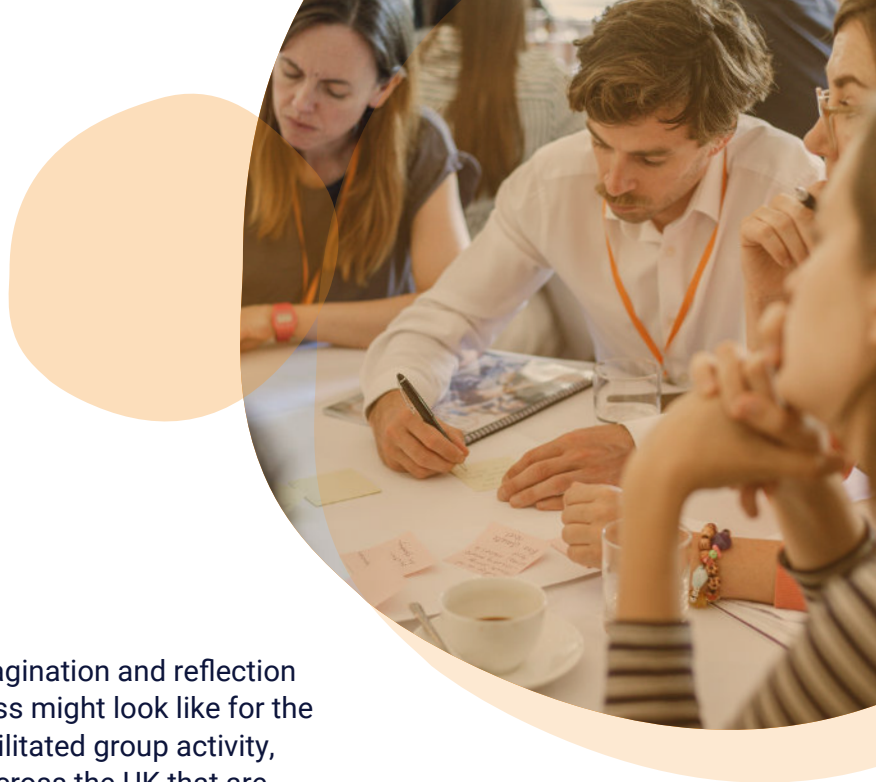
SONI is Northern Ireland's Transmission System Operator, responsible for the nation's electricity grid. Northern Ireland has a legal requirement for 80% of its electricity production to be from renewable sources by 2030. Effective public engagement is crucial to their goal. To identify an acceptable solution and route for the power lines, they recruited a Citizen Sounding Board (24 local residents who reflected their local community) and a Community Forum. Engaging in this way, SONI proceeded to choose a solution with the community's preferences in mind - building trust and understanding. Involving the community early on was crucial, giving them time to adjust to the idea as well as contribute throughout the decision making process.

Floodlights

The city of Hull, in East Yorkshire, is at high risk of flooding. To explore the relationship residents have with water and flooding, Absolutely Cultured, Living with Water, Yorkshire Water and the University of Hull partnered on a projection and light installation titled Floodlights. Floodlights was an audiovisual exhibition exploring Hull's proximity to water and the risk of flooding, giving participants a sense of what it may be like to experience flooding. Although short-lived, the experience promoted physical engagement and encouraged conversations within the community - particularly amongst those who may not have engaged much with climate risks previously, creating opportunities to connect emotionally with the subject.

Barnet Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change and Biodiversity

After declaring a Climate Emergency, the London Borough of Barnet convened a Citizen's Assembly on Climate Change and Biodiversity. The Assembly brought together 60 local residents aged 12 to 90 through an adult citizen's assembly and a Young People's assembly. The members of the assembly discussed their views on the question "Barnet has declared a climate emergency. What more can we do together to make Barnet more sustainable, now and in the future?" The result was a series of twenty recommendations across five emerging themes: waste and sustainable consumption; learning, communication and partnerships; nature and biodiversity; travel; and housing, building and renewable energy. Following the citizen's assembly, the council brought together five Community Action Groups, comprised of community groups and residents, to help take forward the assembly's recommendations.



The morning interactive session invited imagination and reflection on what is working, where, and what success might look like for the public participation strategy. Through a facilitated group activity, participants shared examples of projects across the UK that are successfully engaging people of all ages in environmental action and learning, with the following themes emerging as important:

- **Schools** were seen as a potential starting point for engaging with the green transition and taking action on a local level, with learning passing from children to parents and households. However, participants emphasised the importance of equipping schools appropriately - with resources and capacity to play their part.
- **Community** was considered a key asset in the green transition, as the starting point for local action, and a source of knowledge and peer support. Participants highlighted the opportunity for the government to meet communities where they are - through the organisations and spaces where communities are already engaging.
- **Young people** were brought up repeatedly as key players in the strategy, given that their job prospects and futures are so profoundly shaped by the green transition. They were seen as potential agents of change, able to play a more active role in shaping and delivering environmental action.



The afternoon interactive session tapped into the aspirations and energy in the room- inviting participants to think about the art of the possible for delivering the public participation strategy. A selection of participants shared their thoughts through an 'open mic', with other participants providing questions and responses. A selection of key insights from these contributions is shared below.

- **Collaborative, place based approaches** were highlighted as a model that is working in several places, where community and service delivery organisations are mobilising around climate action. Participants highlighted the importance of place-based approaches which consider the specific needs, assets and stakeholders of different communities.
- **The importance of a strong vision of the future** that people can rally around, aptly summarised by a speaker as “what are we sustaining”? Speakers shared the risk of the green transition being experienced negatively by people, especially those most vulnerable. There’s an opportunity to build a collaborative vision of the future, where people feel included and can see the potential benefits to their lives.
- **Participation readiness**, or the right skills, capacity and infrastructures within government to support public participation, is key to realising the strategy. Participants highlighted the need to identify and prepare “homes” for public participation, potentially in local authorities. This might include the infrastructure for new long term governance structures that pull in the voices of communities to inform decision making.
- **Getting the terminology right** came up repeatedly. Participants felt that a set of clear terminology is missing, including a clear definition for public participation, and language around the transition to net zero. The language should be accessible, future orientated and positive, meeting the language needs of communities across the UK. Additionally, participants highlighted the opportunity to re-name the public participation strategy.

At the end of the day, participants were invited to share pledges and possibilities around what other organisations are doing to deliver Net Zero - that might contribute to public participation strategy. A total of 29 pledges and possibilities were collected, which highlighted the following themes:

- **Building skills** amongst the public to enable them to participate meaningfully. Participants reiterated the importance of schools in enabling participation, including knowledge on how our democracy works and how the public might engage with it.
- **Arts and culture** were identified as a crucial part of setting a vision for the green transition, driving understanding and support towards a cultural change.
- **Rural communities**, including farmers, were highlighted as a target audience that needs to be kept in mind. Participants identified the need for place sensitive approaches to rural places, which may have a different journey.
- **Joining up** actors across sectors in places was highlighted as a key goal for the public participation strategy. Participants pointed out the potential of local authorities to play a role in facilitating collaborative action in their places, and potentially capturing and sharing learning about what's working. Community organisations, including faith organisations, were identified as key social infrastructure- already prepared to engage communities, raise awareness and even raise funds.
- Nature as an inspiration and connector. Participants shared the importance of bringing people together around things that are valued rather than only around risks. They identified nature, and specifically the ocean, as cultural heritage that communities can feel united around.

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Climate is culture- the arts play an absolutely vital role in driving public understanding and support for these changes. Public art and art making brings communities together for peer to peer exchange, learning and strengthening of the bonds we will need as we address and adapt to the climate crisis. Art will tell a powerful story”

Anonymous participant

“

Important to set out the role of local government (not always doing the work but important role in facilitating), and adequately resource for this essential piece of the work. Don't forget to consider how partnerships of local authorities working at regional/subregional scale... could help to embed and scale. One step removed from action being delivered in communities but important potential for joining things up...”

Anonymous participant

“

I would like to see the public participation strategy create a compelling story around why we need environmental action and how these changes will impact people's everyday lives. The story should be unifying, making a strong, pragmatic case that will appeal to people across the political spectrum and from all communities and backgrounds.”

Anonymous participant

Possibilities for impact and next steps

The event highlighted the breadth and depth of the challenge of public participation in the green transition. Yet, the pervading feeling in the room was excitement and a desire for action. Despite the enormity of this challenge, getting it right is deeply important. And it's clear it will require all of us—including organisations of all sizes, the community sector and civil society.

Fortunately, the event highlighted that there is already a huge amount of great work happening, and a wealth of assets that can be built on. The people and organisations that attended were clear in their desire to deliver more and deeper public participation. There is a strong desire to work collaboratively, share and learn from each other while meeting the needs of different people and places sensitively.

A number of participants commented on the openness of the discussions and the willingness to continue to experiment, try new things and model new approaches together. As one said: “there is a big, vibrant, positive, highly experienced joined up sector ready to support policy enactment.”

While this is a strategy set and led by Government, there is a clear opportunity for ongoing collaboration and leadership across different sectors so we can continue to bring together the organisations working in this space.

Together, we can shape the direction of this work, and bring a willingness to go on the journey, learning and improving along the way.



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John Ellerman
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**The Young
Foundation**

The Young Foundation
Toynbee Hall
28 Commercial Street
London
E1 6LS

@the_young_fdn
+44 (0)20 8980 6263
hello@youngfoundation.org
youngfoundation.org