Climate Change Workshop

Who Should Act, and What's Standing in the Way?
(..And How Can We Influence Meaningful Change?)

Hosted by Aberdeen Climate Action
Date: Tuesday 23rd September 2025
Time: 6:30pm registration | 7:00pm start | 9:00pm close
Venue: North East Scotland College
Tickets: by Eventbrite

Summary

Individuals concerned about climate change ranked the five groups of actors with the power to make change (Individuals/communities; Governments; High emitting companies; Businesses other than high emitters; Media/culture/arts) in order of their importance and listed a large range of actions, barriers and levers that illustrate how those groups could act, what is holding them back and nudges that might be employed to speed planet-saving impacts. This report used ChatGPT to order and summarize these into a format that should be insightful and useful for all tasked with climate action (i.e. **everyone**).



1 Purpose

With a Holyrood election approaching in 2026, it is vital for communities to understand the dynamics of climate action and to build the skills needed to advocate effectively, think critically, and act with impact to avert a climate disaster.

This interactive workshop brought members of the Aberdeen community together to explore:

- Who has the greatest power and responsibility to act on climate change?
- What barriers hold these groups back?
- How can we, as a community, influence meaningful change?

The insights are herewith compiled into a report to inform future climate action efforts, including communications with election candidates and elected officials as Scotland works toward the 2045 net zero targets.

2 Approach

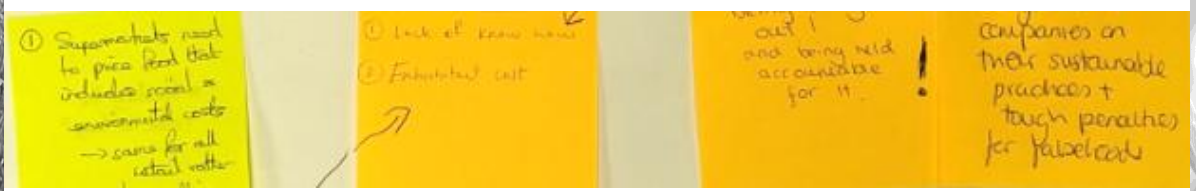
The event was part of Climate Week North East. A total of 22 people attended not counting the organizers. Approximately one half were regular attenders of Aberdeen Climate Action's Climate Cafes. After a brief introduction to the event, they were invited to choose the top three from five groups of actors as listed in **Table 1** below, based on those they think are the most important for climate action. Then, they were invited to sit at the table allocated to their top choice. Each table had a neutral facilitator who helped participants to use post-it notes to address each of three following questions related to the group of the table

1 What actions could [the group] take to address climate change?
2 What is preventing [the group] from taking actions to address climate change?
3 What levers (pressures, incentives, opportunities) could encourage [the group] to take actions to address climate change?

After 20 minutes the attenders were requested to move to another table, for their second choice. After another 20 minutes they were requested to move to a third (and final) table associated with their third choice. There was a restriction placed on tables such that there should be no more than 5 participants in each, meaning that the number of participants choosing each group does not perfectly match the attendee's order of importance.

Table 1: Groups, facilitators and number of participants (over three sessions)

Group (actors on climate change)	Facilitator	Participants	Number of Post-its for each Question		
			1 (actions)	2 (barriers)	3 (levers)
Individuals & Communities	Shaleen Sharma	13	38	23	11
Government (local & national)	Charlotte Gray	14	33	22	27
High Emitting Industries (e.g. energy, industry)	Erik Dalhuijsen	14	27	24	23
Business (other than High Emitting)	Adam Price	8	15	19	18
Media, Culture, Arts	Alison Stuart	6	19	9	6



3 Data Analysis

From five groups and three questions, a total of 314 postits were typed into text organized into the 15 group/question lists. ChatGPT[1] was used to summarize each of the 15 groups separately as follows

For question 1 (actions)

Step 1 Asked ChatGPT "*Pull out the main messages from the list below of comments from attendees at a workshop who were asked "What actions could [group] take to address climate change"*

Step 2 Asked ChatGPT "*Can you do a short summary of the above?"*

Step 3 Asked ChatGTTP *"Can you pull out one key message from the two steps above?"*

Step 4 in order to find common and unique features, told ChatGPT "*I am going to give you 5 lists of actions that different groups could take to tackle climate change. Those groups are Governments; High carbon-emitting industries; businesses other than high-emitters; individuals and communities; Culture, media and the arts. The lists will come in that order. Please find barriers which are common across many groups, and those that seem unique to one group*."

For question 2 (barriers)

Step 1 Asked ChatGPT "*Pull out the main messages from the list below of comments from attendees at a workshop who were asked "What is preventing [group] from taking action to address climate change"*

Step 2 and 3 as in question 1.

Step 4 in order to find common and unique features, told ChatGPT "*I am going to give you 5 lists of barriers prevent that different groups from taking action to tackle climate change. Those groups are Governments; High carbon-emitting industries; businesses other than high-emitters; individuals and communities; Culture, media and the arts. The lists will come in that order. Please find barriers which are common across many groups, and those that seem unique to one group*."

For question 3 (levers)

Step 1 Asked ChatGPT "*Pull out the main messages from the list below of comments from attendees at a workshop who were asked " What levers (pressures, incentives, opportunities) could encourage [group] to take actions to address climate change"*

Step 2 and 3 as in question 1.

Step 4 in order to find common and unique features, told ChatGPT "*I am going to give you 5 lists of levers (pressures, incentives, opportunities) that different groups could take to tackle climate change. Those groups are Governments; High carbon-emitting industries; businesses other than high-emitters; individuals and communities; Culture, media and the arts. The lists will come in that order. Please find barriers which are common across many groups, and those that seem unique to one group*."

4 Results

4.1 Step 1

The results of the ChatGPT summaries in step 2 above are presented in Tables 2-4.

Table 2: Main actions identified for each group (ChatGPT summary from step 2 to the question *What actions could [group] take to address climate change?*)

Group	Actions
Individuals & Communities	• Raise awareness and education, become carbon literate, and inspire others through storytelling and events • Take personal responsibility through sustainable lifestyle choices—reduce waste, avoid fast fashion, and make eco-friendly purchases • Choose low-carbon transport, like public transit or electric vehicles • Act locally, support community initiatives, local businesses, and enhance green spaces and biodiversity.
Government (local & national)	• Implement clear and ambitious climate policies, • Enforce regulations • Provide financial incentives to support sustainable energy and other practices • Invest in education • Promote transparency and trust • Coordinate with civil society • Involve experts to ensure effective implementation and innovation
High Emitting Industries (e.g. energy, industry)	• Take greater responsibility for their environmental impact by investing in renewable energy, reducing waste, and improving carbon measurement and pollution controls • Be transparent about emissions • Comply with regulations • Ensure internal accountability • Collaborate with researchers, stakeholders, and small businesses to support innovation and a just energy transition. • Upskill the workforce • Fund climate initiatives • End unethical practices like political influence-buying
Business (other than High Emitting)	• Implement sustainable policies and eco-friendly operations • Reduce waste and manage resources responsibly • Encourage sustainable travel for employees and customers • Procure locally and choose environmentally responsible suppliers • Price products to reflect their true social and environmental costs • Reward sustainable behaviours and support wider climate initiatives • Increase awareness of their environmental impact • Make carbon costs clear to consumers
Media, Culture, Arts	• Provide honest, regular, and balanced coverage of climate issues, without sensationalism or bias • Connect climate change to real-world events and personal experiences to make it more relatable • Promote sustainability through creative expression, showing its beauty and cultural relevance • Support positive, hopeful messaging that inspires rather than overwhelms • Offer diverse and respectful perspectives • Encourage support for local, climate-friendly initiatives

Table 3: Main barriers identified for each group (ChatGPT summary from step 2 to the question *What is preventing [group] from taking action to address climate change?*)

Group	• Barriers
Individuals & Communities	• Psychological and behavioural factors, such as lack of motivation, fatigue, resistance to change, and a sense of powerlessness. • Financial challenges, including high costs of sustainable options, unclear economic benefits, and dependence on polluting industries. • Information gaps, with people unsure what actions to take, misled by marketing, or lacking climate awareness. • Systemic obstacles, such as poor policies, limited infrastructure, lack of political trust, and unsupportive community environments.
Government (local & national)	• Political challenges like short-term focus, partisanship, and fear of losing support, • Economic constraints • Corporate influence • Limited knowledge (in governments) • Lack of public pressure • Resistance to inconvenient changes
High Emitting Industries (e.g. energy, industry)	• Strong focus on short-term profits, • High costs of change • Uncertainty around government policies and carbon pricing Outdated business models, • Lack of green skills • Limited awareness of sustainable options • Climate risks are not prioritized • Systemic incentives to act remain weak
Business (other than High Emitting)	• Financial pressures, such as high upfront costs, limited funding, and a focus on profitability • Resistance to change, due to pressure to maintain the status quo and misalignment with business objectives • Lack of knowledge and support, including limited awareness, expertise, and access to advice • Structural challenges, like unsustainable supply chains, lack of alternatives, and burdensome regulations
Media, Culture, Arts	• Commercial pressures and ownership by big business, which often prioritise profit and maintaining the status quo • Lack of awareness or understanding of the climate crisis and how to communicate it effectively • Tensions between artistic expression and scientific narratives, leading to uncertainty about how to tell climate stories • Practical challenges, including fear of losing audience attention, misinformation (e.g. fake news, AI), and limited space for subtle messaging

Table 4: Main levers identified for each group (ChatGPT summary from step 2 to the question *What levers (pressures, incentives, opportunities) could encourage [group] to take actions to address climate change?*)

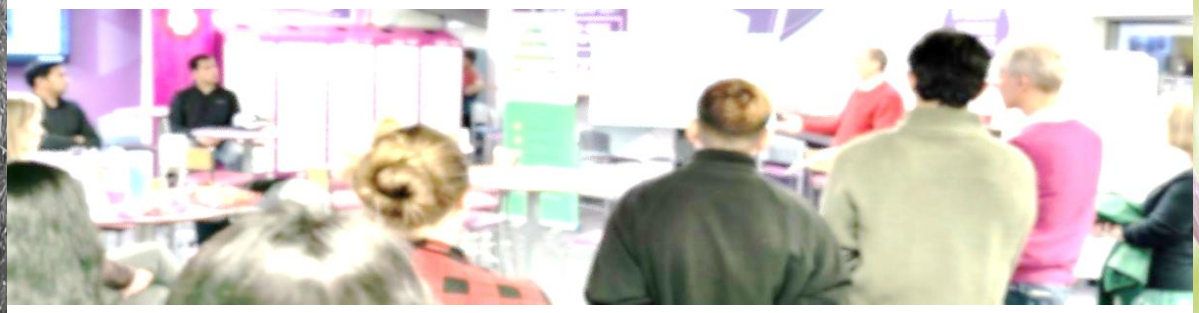
Group	Levers
Individuals & Communities	• Financial incentives, such as discounts, subsidies, or rewards for sustainable choices. • Supportive policies, including removing government barriers and making it easier to take part in campaigns. • Community empowerment, through recognition, expert support, and inclusive dialogue with government. • Early climate education, to build long-term awareness and engagement.
Government (local & national)	• Strong public and political pressure • Financial incentives and penalties • International accountability • Reforms to policymaking structures • Supporting innovation • Improve public access to reliable information • Empower climate-conscious voting
High Emitting Industries (e.g. energy, industry)	• Financial incentives like tax breaks and funding • Strong regulations, enforcement, and transparent reporting • Support workforce upskilling, R&D, and sustainable business opportunities • Social and reputational pressures, can further motivate industries to reduce emissions.
Business (other than High Emitting)	• Financial incentives, such as tax breaks, subsidies, and support for green investments • Stronger legislation and regulation, including mandatory sustainability policies, reporting requirements, and accountability for greenwashing • Better education and transparency, helping businesses understand what actions to take and promoting clear sustainability labelling • Consumer and social pressure, including boycotts, shifting values, and support for local sustainable suppliers
Media, Culture, Arts	• Public and shareholder pressure to demand responsible climate coverage • Sharing impactful personal stories to raise awareness • Regulation to increase transparency and accountability • Financial support through sponsorships for sustainability content • Improved education on climate issues within these sectors

4.2 Results from Step 3

The messages for each group from Step 3 are as follows:

Individuals and communities can drive meaningful climate action by taking personal responsibility, making sustainable choices, and engaging collectively. A lack of knowledge, resources, and supportive social or cultural conditions prevents individuals and communities from taking meaningful climate action. Providing incentives, education, support, and accessible opportunities can empower individuals and communities to take meaningful climate action.

Governments must lead with clear policies, strong enforcement, and targeted incentives while fostering education and transparency to drive meaningful climate action. Political short-termism, economic pressures, limited expertise, and insufficient public demand are key barriers preventing governments from taking effective climate action. Public pressure, political reform, and targeted financial incentives are essential levers to push governments toward meaningful and accountable climate action.



High-emitting industries must take full responsibility for their climate impact by investing in clean technologies, being transparent and accountable, and actively driving a fair and collaborative transition to a low-carbon future. High carbon-emitting industries are hindered by short-term profit priorities, weak policy incentives, and organizational resistance, which together block meaningful climate action despite available sustainable opportunities. Effective climate action by high carbon-emitting industries requires a mix of strong financial incentives, clear and enforceable regulations, transparent accountability, and support for innovation and workforce development.

Businesses other than high emitters can combat climate change by integrating sustainability into operations, influencing behavior, and supporting broader environmental initiatives. Financial pressures, operational constraints, and lack of knowledge or support prevent businesses from taking meaningful action on climate change. Combining financial incentives, regulations, consumer pressure, and practical support can motivate businesses to take meaningful action on climate change.

Media, culture and the arts should use truthful, creative, and culturally aware storytelling to make climate change real, relatable, and motivating for positive action. Profit motives, misinformation, and limited awareness are holding back honest and creative action on climate change in the media, culture, and arts. Greater accountability, education, and support—combined with authentic storytelling—can enable the media, culture, and arts to take meaningful action on climate change.

4.3 Results from Step 4: Common and unique features

4.3.1 Actions

Common actions

Invest in low-carbon or sustainable technologies – Governments, industries, businesses, individuals, media all need to adopt or support greener options.

Increase knowledge and awareness – Climate literacy, education, and transparency to inform choices.

Change behaviors and overcome resistance – Shift habits, norms, and operational routines that maintain the status quo.

Implement and enforce policies or standards – Regulations, reporting, and incentives to guide action.

Communicate and engage effectively – Clear, honest messaging and collaboration between groups to drive action.

Unique actions

Individuals and communities: Overcome psychological and behavioral barriers (e.g., convenience, fatigue, habits).

Governments: Establish trust and political legitimacy; manage large-scale infrastructure and nationalize utilities.

High-emitting industries: Transition legacy business models and manage supply chain accountability while resisting lobbying pressures.

Businesses other than high emitters: Balance environmental costs with pricing and consumer expectations.

Culture, media, and the arts: Produce climate content that balances commercial pressures, bias, and storytelling impact.

ChatGPT's final thoughts on actions: Unique barriers mostly relate to structural or operational constraints: governments (politics, infrastructure), high-emitting industries (legacy business models, lobbying), non-high-emitting businesses (pricing and carbon cost transparency), individuals (behavioral limits), and media/arts (commercial pressures and bias).

4.3.2 Barriers

Common barriers

Short-term thinking and profit focus: Decisions are driven by short-term financial or political gains rather than long-term sustainability.

Lack of knowledge, skills, and awareness: Across all groups, there is insufficient understanding of climate issues, solutions, and their practical impact.

Resistance to change and inertia: Established habits, systems, and comfort with the status quo make people and institutions slow to adapt.

Economic and cost constraints: The perceived or real financial burden of acting sustainably prevents investment or behaviour change.

Power of vested interests and external influence: Lobbying, shareholder pressure, media ownership, and misinformation undermine or delay climate action

Unique barriers

Individuals & communities: People too busy/lazy, compassion fatigue, life energy constraints, social/cultural values differences, not obvious which actions matter most.

Government: Tribal politics, political dogma, fear of losing votes/donations, corporatization.

High-emitting industries: Uncertainty over government regulations/taxes, volatility in emissions pricing, low value placed on environmental/social outcomes in their business model.

Businesses other than high-emitters: Lack of sustainable supply chain/services, lack of alternatives to unsustainable practices, lack of support for innovation.

Culture, media and the arts: Fear of losing attention/viewers, conflicts between artistic expression and factual narratives, hard to convey sustainability subtly, AI/fake news complicating awareness.

ChatGPT's final thought on barriers: Each group faces unique barriers shaped by its role — from political self-interest and profit-driven business models to lack of expertise, personal convenience, and corporate control of narratives — all of which reinforce inertia and slow collective climate action.

4.3.3 Levers

Common levers

Use financial tools (carrots and sticks) to encourage greener behavior

Create legal and regulatory frameworks to hold actors accountable and raise minimum standards.

Grassroots and public influence as a cross-cutting pressure point across all groups

Knowledge is power — and education is a critical enabling force across all sectors

Engagement between sectors and stakeholder groups is vital for coordinated climate action

Unique levers

Individuals and communities could act on a micro level with hyper-localized influence and grassroots organizing

Governments alone have the power to reshape democratic processes and legal frameworks.

High-emitting industries face unique levers tied to operations (e.g. inclusion in licensing and investments schemes), trade (eg carbon-based trade policy), and reputational risk

Businesses other than high emitters are uniquely positioned to influence consumers directly and change business culture internally

Media, culture and the arts have a unique ability to shape public opinion, values, and emotional engagement with climate issues.

ChatGPT's final thought on levers "Climate action is most effective when intersecting levers are coordinated — e.g., laws enabling communities, or public pressure moving governments."

5 Conclusions

A short workshop with only 22 people who are concerned about the urgency required for climate action identified governments, high emitting industries and individuals/communities as the main groups with the potential drivers for progress on this global crisis while other businesses and the media, culture and the arts were considered less critical. In only 2 hrs they identified a huge range of sensible, insightful and achievable actions that could be taken to create a step-change in the momentum for transition. People within all of these groups should take note and act accordingly. While many actions are being done to some extent, most are either not happening anything like enough or not at all. The greatest chance of the effective and rapid action that everyone on the planet needs requires these groups to act in a coordinated way, **which is currently not occurring.**

Recommendations

- **Read** this report and note the insight it offers
- **Check** that you or your organization recognize the actions relevant to you/your organization
- **Work** towards a more urgent and collaborative response to climate change
- **Respond** to ACA indicating what you are doing to address the climate crisis

Contact: info@aberdeenclimateaction.org

Acknowledgements
The workshop was conceived and designed by ACA volunteers Natallie Leeder, Bridgid Norman, Erik Dalhuijsen, Rachel Maurice, Charlotte Gray and Adam Price. The event was run by the facilitators listed in Table 1 and Rachel Maurice. Thanks are extended to all.



1 Note on the use of ChatGPT.
Aberdeen Climate Action is aware that the use of AI is resource intensive but justify its use as a trial to see its utility in time save (and hence enhance efficacy) can balance its greenhouse gas emissions. According to ChatGPT itself, each task uses between 300-600 Wh of energy. Taking the average, this report with 12 tasks used 5.4 kWhs of electricity. It is not possible to attribute a carbon cost to that electricity because the location of the energy consumption is not known.

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