Climate Change Q & A with Rachel Coxcoon

Do aeroplanes not cause emissions?

Yes, aviation is a key sector for emissions. Globally, aviation produced 2.4 percent of total CO2 emissions in 2018. While this may seem like a relatively small amount, consider that if global commercial aviation were a country in the national CO2 emissions standings, the industry would rank number six in the world between Japan and Germany. Non-CO2 effects, such as warming induced by aircraft contrails and other pollutants, bring the combined total contribution of commercial aviation to approximately 5 percent of the world's climate-warming problem.

If you live in rural areas you need cars.

Yes - for long journeys, but this is not necessarily true for sub-2-mile journeys. Local government needs to look at how it can tackle as many short journeys as possible. This could be through the provision of local loop buses in bigger towns, as well as the provision of better active travel links - well lit, segregated paths and cycle lanes, good quality bike storage in village and town centres, and looking at where pinch points and 'missing links' are stopping people from using active travel. This could be as far as looking at closing certain roads to through traffic using modal filters, especially in larger towns (see Low Traffic Neighbourhoods for more info). This needs HUGE emphasis on public consultation - unless and until people accept that the private car should not be allowed to dominate the public realm, these changes could be difficult to implement. Useful messaging is around children's rights and independence. Children cannot safely play out or cycle and walk to school where cars dominate. This has fundamentally changed the nature of childhood and has implications for how children learn independence. This is a message that resonates with many once it's out there but is not immediately obvious when you begin conversations about restricting traffic flows. Really interesting thoughts on that here: https://playingout.net/childrens-right-to-play-is-a-matter-of-spatial-justice/

Concerns are raised that electric required to power vehicles could still come from a dirty source and not necessarily green. How can the government ensure buying these vehicles this is not just a tick box exercise?

Yes - energy through the grid comes from a mix of sources, - coal, gas, nuclear and renewables. Two things to promote alongside EV take up are getting people to switch to genuinely green tariffs (See here: https://www.cse.org.uk/advice/advice-and-support/green-electricity-tariffs for info on this), and also getting them to use apps that show them when grid carbon intensity is at its lowest, and charging at those times when possible. https://www.nationalgrideso.com/news/introducing-our-carbon-intensity-app Having your own solar etc would also help, but this of course requires extra investment.

Last bus from town is at 5.40pm, no other form of public transport

Lack of public transport is a real issue, so therefore we encourage focusing on short journeys that could be done without any form of motorised transport as a separate issue to 'inter-settlement' travel. Otherwise, people conflate the two and the 'there are no buses' narrative comes to

dominate the whole debate. By tackling short journeys as a separate issue, you can then deal with the public transport situation separately.

That is the thing, other than the school bus, our village has a bus that allows you to get out for once a week for about 2 hours. There are 4 of us in our house, and we each have a car, we could not get to work without it.

Lack of buses is usually a county-wide or even cross-boundary issue. A concerted message from groups of parishes working together is always going to be better than individual demands. Is there something that you and your surrounding parishes can do to understand the real demand? There is an interesting case study here about improving rural transport in Essex that may provide some inspiration: https://www.wearefuturegov.com/work/rural-transport-on-demand

We are looking into setting up rural community transport - small regular minibuses to take people into town and to transport links and health services. This will visit numerous villages on route.

Yes, I have seen examples of this and it's something we're also looking at in the Cotswolds. One of the key innovations will be using technology to make it a more on-demand service. There are some good examples of Demand Responsive Travel (DRT), but they all do suffer from the perception that they are 'just for old people'. It feels to me that one barrier to overcome is to make buses cool, and to do this, young people have to be involved in both service design and choice and decor of the vehicles to be used. Moorlands Connect is a good example of a DRT bus service in a rural area: https://www.ashbournect.org.uk/moorlands-connect and Vamooz is a really interesting concept for connecting up multiple similar trips, e.g. school runs and commutes. https://govamooz.co.uk/ (and it's cooler and not old lady buses!)

Once admissions are in the atmosphere can they go out of the atmosphere, can the figure go down?

Yes, through a process called 'sequestration'. Trees can be used to do this. There is much discussion around a range of industrial-scale technologies that are grouped together under the label 'Carbon Capture and Storage' (CCS) or even 'Carbon Capture, Storage and Utilisation' (CCSU). However, none of these are proven at scale, and despite many millions of dollars of investment, they do not look like solutions that will be available soon. This is where we need to make a distinction between those people who rely on 'technological optimism' (we can carry on as we are an invention will occur that will save us), or the realism that many of the solutions we need are already available to us, but they require lifestyle changes that are politically unpalatable because they require politicians to have difficult conversations. I recommend the Ashden Co-Benefits toolkit as a good way of framing why many of those immediately available solutions will actually improve health, social, economic and local environment indicators as well. https://ashden.org/climate-action-co-benefits-toolkit/

The fact that cars are much more efficient these days (5l/100km as opposed to 12-15l/100km in the 80ies is being offset by more and more cars. Often necessary as services and work seems to move further and further away from where people live, with little or no public transport to support this trend.

Agreed - we drive more miles, and many households require both parents to have a job to make ends meet, often driving in different directions. There are nearly 40 million cars on the road now, vs 13 million in 1970. Alongside working from home (as many of us now are), local councils can help to reduce commuter mileage by supporting the development of work hubs. These create a sense of community that many people miss in the office but allow for people to work more locally where their employment is suited to this. Lovely example of this here: http://www.ruralbusinesshub.com/

Pre covid I rode an electric bike to work. They are getting more and more popular and common.

Agree, I had an electric bike and no car at all when I lived in Bristol for 5 years. I am basically lazy and do not like cycling and it was fine for me. Also transported twins on it for a while. I cannot recommend electric bikes enough. And you can get tricycle and cargo bike versions that are more stable for those who have not cycled in ages, and also can carry a substantial load, e.g. shopping. I am hoping to start a 'cargo bikes' hub in the town I represent in the Cotswolds so people from the big housing estates can get into town to do shopping without their cars by using cargo e-bikes from a shared pool. I think this is the sort of thing town and parish councils could consider investing in.

I wish electric cars were not basically silent, that makes them quite dangerous in many scenarios for many people.

Again, I think this is down to whether we continue to consider the car as king. The Highways Code is currently out for consultation and the proposals are to make pedestrians the number one priority. Car drivers all need to learn that they do not necessarily have the right to plough on. I would encourage people to respond to the Highway Code consultations while they are still open. https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/K736D5/

It will be interesting to see if the reduction in the number of flights will show any difference. It is also devastating to know the hidden ingredients in our food has the direct impact of rain forests being cut down.

Yes, this is a really important point and one I should have been clearer on when discussing deforestation. Public enemy number one is PALM OIL. It is everywhere, from biscuits, to soap to cleaning products. There is a fab website here that show you how to identify where it is hidden in ingredients lists. Public awareness raising on this is a great campaign at the grassroots level, and one that is easy to get lots of people behind. A nice way of introducing people to climate action, as rejecting palm oil reduces the pressure on deforestation, and that is a major source of CO2 emissions. https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/palm-oil/palm-oil-free-list

I would like to replace our van with an electric one for our ground maintenance team. For the short distances they travel it makes sense. Are there any grants available? £30k+ is not an option for our council.

I can't remember the name or find my notes, but I feel sure the Town Council in Surrey that mentioned this was talking about the Crown Commercial Services Procurement Framework, so look into this. They were able to secure a huge discount on a van.

We have a pay and display car park, and I would love to find out if/how we go about getting an electric charging point installed.

There are grants available. The best thing to do is to talk to your local authority and see if they already have a plan to procure for their own car parks, as you may be able to add to their procurement.

What climate change grants are available?

There are grants for On Street Residential Charge points. This is where people want to have Evs but they do not have their own driveways etc. You can identify this latent need and then work with householders and the Local Authority (as they are the ones who have to apply for the grants). In general, CSE keeps a fundraising list on our website, and we have a little video for parishes here on different fundraising ideas: https://youtu.be/S1mcr48SeYc

What's happening with international agreements, as surely, we need all countries to make significant changes?

Around 200 nations are signed up to the Paris Agreement, through which we are all agreed that keeping temperature rises to below 2 degrees is the aim. The trouble is the USA, under Trump, has pulled out. But China announced only three weeks ago an incredibly ambitious plan to be net zero by 2060 with emissions peaking in 2030. This is fantastic news, but we cannot be complacent. We must all play a leadership role and cross our fingers that Trump loses next month! We also need to lead the charge on developing new technologies and driving demand for things like solar so that the prices come down and we can support less well-off countries to 'leapfrog' the fossil fuel phase and go straight into a cleaner future. For African nations in particular this is crucial, and it's also morally indefensible for us to do anything else. African nations have contributed less than anyone else to the climate crisis, but the continent as a whole stands to be more severely affected than almost anywhere else on the planet.

I agree that the reduction in flights could have a big impact but, as this is something that has been forced on us due to the pandemic rather than a choice, flights will increase again.

We should all be lobbying our MPs to remove the tax breaks that the aviation industry gets, especially on fuel. Demand will fall if pricing alters. Taxing frequent flyers would also be a progressive move. It would protect the ability of lower income households to take intermittent holidays by air, but should punitively tackle very regular flying.

6%of the population fly. You don't have to fly the same as people don't need to buy things all the time.

Yes - research about a year ago showed that a hardcore of about 15% of the population take 70% of the flights. We need to change the conversation around frequent flying - it should not be seen as aspirational, but as wasteful and damaging. In Sweden there is a fascinating new social movement called 'Flight Shame' that is really changing the narrative on this: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-49890057

We've bought an electric vehicle for the outdoor team - but is that just shifting emissions from Transport to Energy Supply - the energy still has to be generated somewhere?

Yes - so if you can at the very least switch to a genuinely green energy supply and also charge at times when the grid is low intensity

Sir David said about covid being linked to humans upsetting the biodiversity and from what I understand we are going to get more diseases, etc if we continue. Covid is mild. What is your perception please?

Yes, there is a clear link between environmental stress and the emergence and spread of novel diseases. Interesting discussion on this here: https://www.propublica.org/article/climate-infectious-diseases

Adaptation? Any change takes time to establish itself what do we do in the meantime?

Adaptation – crucial, and something I did not have time to cover. We are already looking at some heating that is locked in because of past emissions. Parish and Town Councils should ideally look to have a climate resilience plan alongside any work they do on rapidly bringing down emissions. Joseph Rowntree Foundation does a lot of work on this and making sure it happens in socially just way: https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/climate-change-adaptation-full_0.pdf

Feel very helpless. We are planting trees and flowers but such a small parish, not sure what we can do, but would like to do something.

Communication is key. Your own emissions will be a fraction of the parish as a whole, so getting residents to make impactful changes of their own is crucial. Drop me an email if you'd like to be kept up to date on our parish climate communications project, or the parish carbon footprint tool we're making.

How do we change the mindset of many people who do not believe/accept the concerns?

Co-benefits is really important. Cleaner air, better local environment, warmer homes that are cheaper to run, less reliance on imports, more active communities being less of a burden on the NHS. But also, particularly for wealthier residents who might be labouring under the misapprehension that they are somehow insulated from this issue, getting information on the real scale of the issue into your communications and newsletter is key. Nobody is wealthy enough to buy their way out of this.

Parochial question but should we revise rules of thumb for the size of general reserves (upwards) when budgeting to account for more risk of unprecedented events due to climate change? drought, pandemics, floods, heatwaves, etc?

That is a really good question. Understanding your key risk areas is a good place to start. UK Climate Impacts Programme has detailed information on weather and flood related impacts at the very local level that might help with this. https://www.ukcip.org.uk/ along with an 'adaptation wizard' local planning tool.

Every town and parish should be planting trees!

Yes, but beware of thinking that this is an 'instead of' action. Tree planting should be done for sequestration and also for shading in urban areas, but it isn't a replacement for massive emissions reduction at the same time. Also, while the costs of tree planting can be surprisingly low, it's the ongoing maintenance that costs. There is nothing more soul destroying than seeing all your new trees wither and die. Woodland Trust give free trees for planting and advice on maintenance.

Many people would say they cannot afford to refit their properties to become 'greener' are there grants available for homeowners we can sign post them to?

Yes, the government recently launched the Green Homes Grant which gives up to £5k to 'able to pay households' and up to £10k to low income households. As with most government schemes, it was launched in a hurry and there are lots of teething problems but bear with it. Also, I highly recommend the Carbon Co-op (Manchester based by nationally relevant), who have an excellent webinar series on domestic retrofit. At CSE, we also run a project called FutureProof, through which we are releasing 'Retrofit Stories' videos by ordinary people who've changed their homes. Loads of info on our project website here: https://futureproof.uk.net/news/ and YouTube channel here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8X4B5HTSHtI&list=PLYahoEmECK5YuzBG4stZ4Mzzd20w--ZsV

Is there more that councils can do to find and support great action already taking place in our communities? (Support might only mean giving them a room to meet in, for example).

Yes - this is what I meant by 'convening'. Just providing venue and a 'secretariat', you can help a lot of local people come together and do their thing!

How can councils communicate and influence change without sounding sanctimonious?

Really good webinar here from the brilliant Climate Outreach Information Programme on how to communicate climate change and have 'climate conversations'. https://climateoutreach.org/media/talking-climate-webinar-how-to-have-a-climate-conversation/

What is CSE that Rachel refers to?

Centre for Sustainable Energy, which is where I work. Www.cse.org.uk

The planning white paper suggests trees on every new street built. It would be a huge challenge and there must be a better way to get many more trees planted.

That's a sop to hide the awfulness inherent in the rest of the White Paper!

But the government needs to change the car first message
yes, and please do promote their Gear Change Strategy, published a couple of months ago, which really changes the tone of this completely. Many local Conservative politicians don't seem to have realised the message from HQ has radically changed!
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904146/gear-change-a-bold-vision-for-cycling-and-walking.pdf

It is not just about tree planting. It is about improving biodiversity so it's about all different types of habitat. Wild flower areas, ponds, etc.

Plant life have resources to help local councils manage their land better for biodiversity. https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/good-verge-guide-different-approach-managing-our-waysides-and-verges

Don't you think plastics is one to change or is it not so high as the other 4 you have stated?

Plastic and the Climate Emergency get conflated but are not the same thing. Yes, there is a massive, massive issue with plastic pollution getting into water and our environment generally, and yes, it is a thing that we use once and throw away often. BUT it is not a main driver of the climate emergency. I meet a lot of people who are worried about climate change and their key response has been to think

about recycling plastic. This is akin to being worried about cancer and deciding to wear a sunhat while still smoking 50 a day!

I am looking after sound advice for retrofitting a public building - quickly. We are looking at starting the project by the end of the month by gutting the old building looking at retro fitting from new year.

You may find that the launch of the Green Homes Grant makes good retrofit builders hard to come by. I would recommend contacting the Association of Environmentally Conscious Builders (AECB) to find a contractor near you.

I would love to use CIL funding for a windmill to provide electricity for the village. Makes you think what you can do.

Contact the Rural Community Energy Fund, run by the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy. There are massive grants available to do all the feasibility, consultation, and development work (up to £140k!!). https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rural-community-energy-fund   I also produced a set of resources about 5 years ago in partnership with CPRE that are designed to help people at the parish scale work out what renewable energy they want in their landscape. See here for info: https://www.cse.org.uk/projects/view/1315

I did email to ask to be a part of your parish communication scheme not heard anything yet.

We are still working on it, hoping to launch later this month or in November with 15 councils, and then open it to lots more shortly after we've tested the first bundles. Anyone who wants to take part email megan.blyth@cse.org.uk to let her know.

What are some easy things we can do as a rural parish that will engage residents?

Talk to them about their concerns. If I were you, I'd start with a public showing of the BBC's 'Climate Change: The Facts' documentary, which you can find here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9WyLPgyuqo followed by a facilitated discussion on two key impact areas of transport and home retrofit. Just start gathering ideas and be clear that you're looking for positive engagement. What will kill off a meeting like that is people saying, 'well there aren't any buses, so we're stuffed'. It needs to be about understanding barriers. So 'if there were buses, would you use them?' When? Where would you be going to? How long would you expect that to take? How often would you use this service and how much would you be willing to pay? Put the ball in their court to start building an evidence base for buses. People often moan but when pressed, they have not thought about it themselves at all. Same for active travel infrastructure - what would help you walk and cycle? You do not have to make promises, but it's a good way to start gathering data and start the conversation.

If it is realistic than in (say) a decade we will have electric cars that are zero carbon in use and in manufacture, then presumably it doesn't matter if local transport is heavily car based?

Yes, I think it still does. Switching to 40 million Evs from 40 million combustion engine cars still comes with a huge carbon footprint in primary materials use, and at the very local level, although Evs are cleaner (tailpipe emissions), all vehicles shed rubber particles as they drive and this makes up a good proportion of the local particulate emissions that cause poor air quality. Pushing car ownership over other forms makes it harder for active and public transport to get investment, thus cementing socio-economic divides, and the private car's dominance of the public realm in terms of

parking and land use is also an issue. Children cannot play out and safely walk to school in a car dominated society, and people lead more sedentary lives when they are encouraged (or forced) to drive. So, there are wider environmental and social reasons to move away from a car dominated society. And also, the more EVs we have, the more renewable energy we need to generate!

Can I say that CSE have GREAT resources for thinking about your Neighbourhood Plan!

We do! Here's a short video about them: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FkIfqDjMt4

I live in a 17th century semi. I have one of those calls we can help you improve your heating. the poor bloke had no idea what to say when I said my heating was one wood burner with 8 radiators and hot water. oh, and an emersion heater for the summer. he could not help me. roof is already insulated. what I need is double glazing and a door with no gap at the bottom. :)

Green Homes Grants covers glazing!