



Cynulliad Hinsawdd
Climate Assembly

Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly

Extinction Rebellion FAQs

21 March 2021

Hello again, everyone

Thank you very much for these great questions. I've invited some other Welsh XR folk to answer them, too, so that you get a range of perspectives. It's a long document but I hope you find it helpful. Below, I've listed the questions you asked, with the page numbers our answers to each question start on; and I've listed the XR folk who've joined me in answering the questions, with a little introductory info.

Also, we'd be very happy to meet with you, on Zoom, in a group, or one to one, or both. And you're also welcome to keep asking for more info by email, for as long as you want.

Here's the email address again (it's for the Citizens' Assemblies Working Group I'm part of):
CymruCAWG@protonmail.com.

Very best wishes,

Sian.

Questions

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XR members answering:

- Sian Cox, aunt of a 25-year-old; addiction and mental health worker with young people aged under 18; member of XR Brecon; and Citizens' Assemblies working group for XR Cymru.
- Sue Lewis, grandparent of five aged 3 – 9; former social worker and social services manager; member of XR Wrexham; and Citizens' Assemblies working group for XR Cymru.
- Dave France, 23 years old; self-employed, carer; member of XR Welshpool; and media and messaging working group for XR Cymru.
- Tom Bullough, father of two aged 7 and 10; writer, tutor in Creative Writing; member of XR Brecon.
- Rob Proctor, father of two aged 11 and 9; Business Development Manager in community energy; member of XR Abergavenny.
- Tom Evans, father of 1 teenage son; husband; recent graduate of biomedical sciences; member of XR Cardiff (and Newport); and Arrestee Support working group for XR Cymru.
- Dave Campbell, father; member of XR Cardiff; and Actions working group for XR Cymru.
- Pam Williams, grandmother of two aged 10 and 8; former junior school teacher and deputy headteacher; retired organic and rare breed livestock farmer.
- David Williams (husband of Pam); former engineer, researcher and teacher; retired organic and rare breed livestock farmer.
- Aaron Thierry, ecologist and Earth systems scientist; former teacher; member of XR Cardiff; founder of XR Scientists.



Answers

Question 1: How does activism play a part in climate change - are those rallies effective compared to normal policy making?

Sian Cox

Our big problem is that normal policy-making is taking us to 3-4 degrees Celsius of global heating by 2100, increasing global emissions and destroying the ecosystems we depend on for life.

To start with the basics of the problem; the key information that everyone should know: What does global heating actually mean for our children and grandchildren? 2 degrees alone means deadly heatwaves, floods, storms and fires, everywhere; vast tracts of the world's land currently inhabited by humans becoming uninhabitable; the rise and spread of fatal diseases; the forced migration of hundreds of millions of people; and the collapse of human systems under these pressures - our systems for food, water, energy, healthcare, work. That's what David Attenborough is referring to when he warns that we face the collapse of civilization. Scientists are warning us that climate and nature breakdown is happening much quicker, much worse and much sooner than they predicted, because of phenomena in Earth's systems called 'self-reinforcing feedback loops'; processes which feed back into themselves, making their own effects ever quicker and worse. I can give you more info about these if you'd like me to. Worse, we're pushing Earth's systems to 'tipping points'; points when the change becomes unstoppable and irreversible. Scientists said in a paper last year that 'tipping points alone mean that we are in a state of planetary emergency'.

Despite warnings from scientists for forty years, governments have carried on subsidising and investing in fossil fuel expansion, investing in projects that damage and destroy nature and biodiversity, deregulating polluting and destructive industries (aviation, transport, construction) so that fewer and fewer rules constrain them, and watering down what protections do exist. Current policy-making is actively contributing to the crisis.

Rallies on their own don't make governments change tack. Rallies are one of the things that activists have been trying for decades, without success.

Civil disobedience does work (Gandhi and Martin Luther King, for example). The rallies XR organise are one part of bigger collective civil disobedience actions that last for days or weeks. Research into the history of civil disobedience worldwide since 1900 shows that what makes it effective is 1) the numbers of people involved (**all** campaigns that recruited 3.5% of the population were successful); and 2) the length of time it goes on for. Civil disobedience works by causing disruption to the everyday working of the nation's economy – transport, business, commerce, government – because that's the only thing that governments respond to. Hindering ordinary people from going about their business is a disruption of the economy.

That's the only reason we do it. We don't enjoy doing it. It's uncomfortable. Like most people, our instincts are to be polite, and get out of the way when someone needs to get past us. It's hard to stay deliberately in someone's way, when they're distressed because you're making



them late for work, or angry with you. We understand their anger and we're genuinely sorry for disrupting them.

We just don't know what else to do. We are up against the combined power of multi-national corporate, banking, media and fossil fuel empires. The only power we have is our power to use our bodies to disrupt the economic and political processes that are driving the relentless destruction.

Covid-19 has been on every news bulletin, every day and night, for a year. The climate and nature crisis should be, too. XR is sounding the alarm because those who should be, aren't.

XR has made a difference. Polls show that the public's concern about climate change has risen steeply in the two years since XR and the youth climate strikes have been active. But awareness-raising isn't enough. We're in a state of planetary emergency. Ours is the first generation to understand how serious the problem is, and the last with the capacity to do anything about it. After us, it will be too late. Our great grandchildren need us to do a good deal more than raise awareness. They need us to get those three demands met, really, really quickly.

Dave France

Q.1: When we look at the history of social change, the collective actions of normal people are always of key importance. From the Suffragettes to the Civil Rights movement, policy changes by Governments usually come about due to pressure from grassroots activism.

Sue Lewis

Q.1: Protests are about drawing attention to the policy-making that is going on and may be failing us. They're about trying to bring more attention onto really important issues around climate change that may be passing the public and mainstream media by.

So activism is one way to increase public awareness, change the conversation and have an effect on policy-making. Many people think that bringing attention to climate change through activism has been a big part of bringing it up the agenda, world-wide. A lot of politicians have commented that Extinction Rebellion and the Youth Climate Strikes have been hugely important in that way.

Tom Bullough

Q.1: Last week the Public Accounts Committee concluded that the government has "no plan" for dealing with the climate crisis. Normal policy making, that is, has categorically failed to meet its obligations on by far the most important issue of our time. Since years of conventional protest - marches, petitions etc - have not been adequate to influence national policy, the responsible public is left with very few options. XR activism - non-violent direct action - has, as yet, not achieved its goals, but it has led directly to the UK parliament's 2019 declaration of a Climate Emergency and to unprecedented levels of public awareness. To be clear, we are talking



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about nothing less than the survival of our children. As Sir David Attenborough warned last month, "If we continue on this path we will face the collapse of everything that gives us our security". Given the stakes, and that activism has had some effect, involvement in XR is perhaps the only responsible course.

Rob Proctor

Q.1: Yes, we are effective; look how many councils and governments have declared climate emergencies. There was no net zero target prior to the school strike and extinction rebellion actions in the last 2 years. Now we have a net zero target by 2050. Not good enough but a big shift. Chris Stark, the Chief Executive of the UK Climate Change Committee, admitted that the activism and protests had made his job of presenting a net zero target by 2050 much easier. He was concerned that it would be considered too ambitious but specifically after the April Rebellion in 2019 he said that a lot of the feedback was that it wasn't ambitious enough. (I haven't got a quote on this but he said it at an event I went to.)

Prior to XR's actions there was no talk of citizens' assemblies, yet here we are having one in Blaenau Gwent. There have been others and the UK government ran one (although its recommendations were only considered as guidance, not binding).

I personally have spent years lobbying and trying to do things through the traditional channels and my experience is that the direct action of Extinction Rebellion, School Strikers and other movements like the Sunrise movement in the US have been far more effective over a short time than all the lobbying I've been involved with. We need both but activism is key. The South Wales valleys has a proud history of activism, from the chartists to the support for miners and their families.

Tom Evans

Q.1: Green-washing aside, we have yet to see meaningful changes aimed at slowing the climate and ecological crisis. That's why we have to keep on protesting until our 3 demands are met. Activism has played a vital part of shaping modern day life in the UK - for example the 5-day work week, the right to vote, the right to roam, and there are lots more examples; all of these things were fought for through activism.

David Williams

Q.1: Activism is vital in addressing the climate crisis - without it, how will the general public be made aware of the need to do something right now? Aiming for 'Net Zero' by 2050 is not only too far away in time for it to have any impact right now, but is such a nebulous concept (what does it actually mean?) that in itself, 'Net Zero' is value-less.



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Question 2. What do you achieve from being an activist that maybe we don't see?

Sian Cox

Firstly, the knowledge of how bad things are is a burden to bear. 'Emergency' isn't said for effect, by any of us. It's a statement of fact.

Before I joined XR, I was in a continuous state of helpless despair, feeling that there was nothing I could do but watch the train wreck happen, unable to alert the driver or help the people on the train. Do any of you know the film Terminator 2, 'Judgement Day'? Do you remember the scene where she falls asleep and dreams that the children in a playground are about to be hit by the fireball of a nuclear explosion, and she's rattling the chain-link fence, screaming a warning at them, and they can't hear? That's how I felt, all the time. XR gave me something to do that might actually work. We need to recruit 3.5% of the UK population. That's about 2 million people. It's do-able. And it gave me the company of other people who knew what I knew and felt how I felt. Who get it. Many of them are now my good, close friends.

Often, the pictures the papers print of our actions make it look like we're having a big party, not caring that we're upsetting people. But it's a false picture. We do play music, dance and joke with each other. But it's also hard work. All around the edge of those pictures are rebels handing out leaflets and talking to passers-by for hours; we're giving training sessions all day long, cooking food (we feed the homeless at every big action we do). When we get arrested we're talking to the police officers about the crisis, telling them the vital information they don't know. We're talking to them as human beings, parents, grandparents. We're talking about the crisis to anyone who'll listen, all day and night! And you have to keep your spirits up when you're doing something that is so uncomfortable; that upsets people, makes them angry with you. It's hard work being calm and gentle with people who are shouting at you; it's hard work sleeping in a tent on a concrete street, with no running water, no toilet. The music and the camaraderie gives you the energy, the extra 'oomph', to keep going; to see it through.

I don't want to spend my annual leave camping in streets, sitting in roads and locked up for hours in police cells. I don't want to spend my wages on train fares to London and court costs and fines. I want to curl up on my sofa reading crime fiction, like I used to do.

But it's not like it used to be. I can't un-know what I know. I can't bury myself in a book as though nothing's wrong. Everything is wrong. I can't lie on my deathbed in however many years' time as the catastrophe sets in all around me, knowing that I did nothing to try to avert it. So one of the things XR, being an activist, gives me is the ability to live with myself. We might fail. But I have to try.

Dave Campbell

Q.2: When I talk to my children about what I do they are proud of me and I have the satisfaction that in 10 years, even if we fail, I will be able to look them squarely in the eye and say I tried.



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Sue Lewis

Q.2: Being an activist helps me a lot in dealing with the fear, anxiety and despair that I sometimes feel about the future if we don't act now - it makes me feel better! In doing something, however small, I'm making a contribution to a better future. I also hope I'm informing and influencing those around me to pay attention to what's happening and do something too. As more and more people start to act as individuals and groups, we have more chance of influencing governments and corporations, and avoiding the worst effects of the climate and nature emergency, even though we can't stop it all. And finally, you meet some brilliant people and form friendships which become part of your life.

Dave France

Q.2: I used to just vote and maybe sign an occasional petition. But after years of doing that and seeing nothing changing, I realised that I needed to fully participate in democracy if I wanted to be represented. Picking between red and blue every five years wasn't going to cut it!

Tom Bullough

Q.2: Being an activist brings considerable benefits for mental health. There is a profound disconnect between the facts surrounding the climate and ecological crisis and public discourse, as reflected by the media and in government policy. Being an activist allows you to face the crisis squarely - as we must - and to spend time with people for whom objective fact is not something simply to be denied or wished away. It brings clarity, purpose and a sense of sanity which have changed my life for the better.

Rob Proctor

Q.2: It is empowering. It gives ordinary people the opportunity to stand up to power and demonstrate that those in power are only in positions of power as long as we the people allow them to be. Our society is a social contract and when our governments or big corporations are acting against our interests - in the case of climate change we're literally talking about our future - then we have a duty to stand up against it and challenge them.

For me personally it is also just more effective than traditional lobbying. In my small village, a small amount of direct action resulted in our community getting measures we'd been campaigning for years for within six months. We now have a 20mph speed limit and speed restriction measures and the road is much safer for all those that live along it. We were ignored for 2-3 years and then one action where we blocked the road for the morning resulted in the change we wanted to see.



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Tom Evans

Q.2: Ultimately when presented with the evidence of the climate and ecological crisis most people are faced with a very small number of options: you can accept the science and ignore it, or reject the science and ignore it, or accept the science and act on it. Activism gives ordinary people agency to act and try to make a difference. Without agency, acceptance of the science leads to despair and feelings of hopelessness. Being a part of XR gives me agency to try and effect change, locally and globally. That said, we should be careful not to label ourselves as 'activist' and 'non-activist'; that division weakens us. There are many reasons why people can't take to the streets; for many people, day to day survival is a very real struggle and when you're worried about the immediate future, distant events seem inconsequential.

Pam Williams

Q. 2. The friendships formed, the trust in others in the same action, the shared despair and optimism, the hope that I'm making a positive change, I'm doing something and not expecting someone else to do it on my behalf, so I can't be blamed for doing nothing, and respect from my grand-daughters, I hope.

David Williams

Q.2: Maybe you don't see the personal wellbeing enhancement of belonging to a group of similarly minded humans, whose love for the planet and one another gives us solidarity and hope for our children's and grand-children's future? Maybe you do!

Question 3. Please can you be brutally honest about what we will have to do or accept to create this change?

Sian Cox

First, as individuals: Start by getting fully informed about the climate and nature crisis, what's perpetuating it, and why, and what it means.

Here are some good places to start, some of them resources created by XR, some of them from non-XR people and organisations.

XR Resources

Reading:

'Emergency on Planet Earth', written by Dr Emily Grossman. She's a TV science writer and reporter, quite well-known. She wrote it with XR scientists (there are a lot of scientists in XR). She lays it out clearly, in everyday language, one thing at a time. She provides her sources, so you can check where her information came from. Places like the Met Office, the UN, top-rated, world class science journals, various national and international science institutes. And you can Google-search other sources, of course.



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You can read it online here: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/the-emergency/>

Or download a copy here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QdWn7PCDqNUQvzmPaJPMEYqsXKAVcuE0MPxcJVdaKjw/edit>

If you want to learn in detail about how the global system is causing the crisis, read Naomi Klein's book 'This Changes Everything.'

Videos

By XR member Tom Sinclair (a tutor at Oxford Uni). He sets everything out, as Emily does, in a way that's easy to understand:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R68VnUCV9bU&ab_channel=ExtinctionRebellionOxford

By Dr Aaron Thierry, an ecologist, who's also a member of XR Cardiff, and the founding member of XR Scientists; and who has answered one of these questions (3). His talk begins at minute 6.30. The talk itself lasts about an hour; the rest is Q&As with the audience.

<https://www.facebook.com/XRCymru/videos/861868017889032/>

Non-XR Resources

There are loads of these; the ones below are just suggestions. I recommend anything by **Professor Kevin Anderson**. He's a British climate scientist and engineer (used to work on oil platforms). He talks in ordinary language and is easy to understand. He has loads of stuff on YouTube.

This is one that he did for XR Cymru last October. He starts at minute 3.19.

<https://www.facebook.com/XRCymru/videos/697235244239638/>

One source for a range of perspectives on the crisis is the series 'Jem Bendell's Q&As'.

Professor Jem Bendell wrote an important paper about the climate and nature emergency, one of the first I read, called 'Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy'. It's another paper that sets things out in a clear, easy to read way.

You can download it here: <https://www.lifeworth.com/deepadaptation.pdf>

And you can watch his Q&As here: <https://jembendell.com/2019/11/12/deep-adaptation-qas-for-2020/>

There are also some excellent **independent news sources** who deliver weekly updates and links to key investigations to your inbox.

DeSmog: <https://www.desmog.co.uk/>

Greenpeace Unearthed: <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/>

Scientists' Warning Organisation: <https://www.scientistswarning.org/>



Second, as societies: Kevin Anderson and Aaron Thierry are both good on this, and discuss it in the talks I've given you links to. There are experts in all the relevant fields, all over the world, working hard on this and presenting governments with paper after paper explaining how to do it. The problem is that governments are ignoring them.

Stephan Harrison, Professor of Climate Change at Exeter University, said at a talk he gave last year: 'We have all the resources we need to deal with this. There is nothing magical about reducing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. There is nothing magical about the greenhouse effect. We have all the tools we need to deal with this. We just don't have the political or economic will to do this.'

VERY IMPORTANTLY: it's not about lifestyle choices by individual people. That is not enough, and it's also not fair. Left to individuals, there will be many who carry on with high-polluting lifestyles. That might be because they have no choice; so governments have to make it possible for people to change their lifestyles; less expensive, less disruptive. It might be because they don't know; so governments and the media have to start publicising it properly, so everyone understands. It might be because they don't care; so governments have to legislate it, so that everyone has to do it.

The influence of the very wealthy and powerful on the problem is an important thing to know. The world's richest 10% cause 50% of global emissions. The world's poorest 50% - half the global population, combined – only cause 10% of emissions. So immediate emissions reductions measures could focus on those causing most emissions. Kevin Anderson has calculated that if the world's richest 10% reduced their emissions to the level of the average European person, global emissions would be cut by a third. One example of this is aviation. Most ordinary people don't fly very often, if at all. The richest 15% of the global population take 70% of all global flights. Governments could create laws limiting flights. There are all sorts of things that can be done; the only thing lacking is the political willingness to do them.

But BG is an example-setter. You have a citizens' assembly! And you have a proud history of activism for change. What you guys decide to do, others might follow. It doesn't have to be all about losing things we like; it's about gaining things, too. You can weigh costs against benefits. For example: How much money will it save the NHS every year if we cut pollution drastically by decarbonising our transport systems and improve health and fitness by increasing active travel? How much less every year will it be spending on treating people for respiratory problems, obesity and cardio-vascular illness? How about the gains from subsidising farmers to grow organic fruit and veg, and create wild spaces on their land for children to roam and play in? Gains like better physical health for all of us, from consuming healthier food, and happier children, because the streets are safe, and they can play outdoors all day, roaming in replenished nature, breathing fresh, clean air, climbing trees, zooming about on their bicycles? Governments can choose to spend tax revenue very differently from how they're spending it now.

And remember, for everything we 'lose' – our cars, our daily meat – poor people in other parts of the world are losing much, much more – their livelihoods, their lands, their lives.



So be bold. Think big. Don't accept 'we can't do that'. They MUST do that! Nothing is impossible. When politicians say something is impossible, what they mean is that it's politically difficult. The truth of the matter is, nothing is off the table.

Aaron Thierry

Q.3: I honestly feel this is the wrong way to look at this. Yes, we will have to make some large changes, but there are all sorts of amazing co-benefits that can come from well thought-out climate action. We shouldn't be afraid of the changes instead we should see it as an opportunity to think about how we can use the necessary transition to a low-carbon economy to fix the existing problems and injustices in our society.

This recent report highlights some of them: <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/the-climate-commons>

This tool for councils helps them identify co-benefits: <https://ashden.org/climate-action-co-benefits-toolkit/>

Just a few examples include...

Tackling fuel poverty through better home insulation.

Redesigning our towns and cities to make living easier by locating shops and services within 15 minutes' walk of everyone.

Reducing air pollution by switching away from dirty car engines to active travel and integrated public transport (air pollution causes 40,000 premature deaths in the UK every year!)

Decentralised community energy projects can cut energy bills and return invest to the community.

A switch to healthier more plant-based diets and supporting local food production.

Planting new forests and restoring peat bogs means the creation and conservation of wildlife habitats.

Insisting that all goods can last longer and be repaired rather than be thrown away.

All of these involve creating new jobs - the TUC in Wales think this could create at least 60,000 new jobs in Wales in just the next couple of years! <https://www.tuc.org.uk/green>.

... if you have a think I'm sure you can imagine many more.

We also have to recognise that it's not necessarily the case that everyone has to reduce emissions by the same amount. Carbon footprints are very closely related to income. In the UK the highest earning 10% of households have much bigger footprints than the poorest 10%. Often these are due to emissions from luxury goods, frequent overseas holidays, second homes, owning large cars, etc. Therefore, if high emitters reduced their footprints to the average level that would reduce emissions by a lot.



Source: <https://theconversation.com/poorest-households-hit-hardest-by-uk-climate-change-charges-despite-using-least-energy-92707>

A more equal society would be one that is easier to decarbonise:

<https://theconversation.com/why-a-more-equal-world-would-be-easier-to-decarbonise-153593>

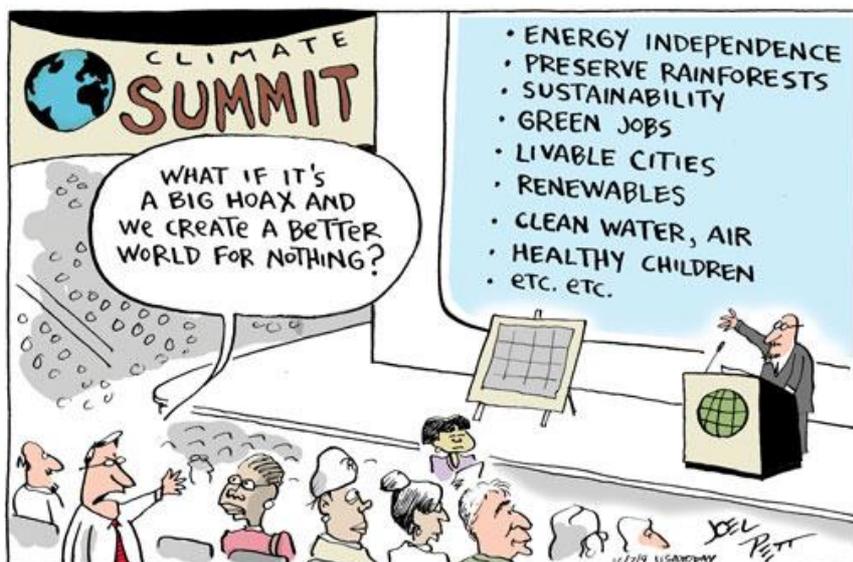
Certain industries will have to change more than others - we won't need coal miners or oil drillers or as many livestock farmers, but we will need teams of wind farm engineers and solar panel installers, home retrofitters, electric bus drivers, bike mechanics, foresters, bioenergy crop farmers, and many more. That is why we need to think about how to ensure a just transition so that workers in affected industries can be supported through the transition and that communities aren't left behind as they were during deindustrialisation in the 1980s.

We can even think of some really big changes such as the introduction of universal income which could break the link between work and consumption. People wouldn't have to take work in environmentally destructive industries, and instead devote their time and labour to making the world a better place!

<https://theconversation.com/weve-declared-a-climate-emergency-heres-what-universal-basic-income-could-do-to-help-the-planet-110222>

Ultimately, there are going to have to be some trade-offs to get to net-zero. We have a fixed carbon budget. How we stay within this depends on what activities we as a society choose to prioritise - for example if we want to allow some flying it might have to mean that we eat less meat. But we can't just look at the negatives; we have to look at the benefits that come from these trade-offs as well. Ultimately, it's for citizens in assemblies like yours to decide what the right balance between these competing demands is.

The fact is there is a whole range solutions that we could implement, but they need political will and that means the public need to get organised and demand politicians act to deliver these changes.





Sue Lewis

Q.3: First of all, just think about what we have to accept if we choose not to make these changes - continuing deforestation and wildfires, more greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, melting polar ice caps, and degraded oceans will mean food shortages, vast floods, refugees on a scale previously unknown, the possibility of half of all species extinct, more pandemics, potential societal collapse, and the poorest in every country coming off worst. All in the lifetime of my grandchildren. Listen to David Attenborough and read his book, 'A Life on Our Planet'.

What we need to accept to avoid the worst of this, is a much better life than we can currently contemplate. Change will happen, whether we like it or not, as Greta Thunberg says.

What we need to do is get governments to act. And secondly to act with much more urgency than they're doing at the moment. By acting, they will make the behavioural and lifestyle changes we need to make a lot easier and more affordable. We know what to do, what needs to change; it's the political will that's lacking.

Tom Bullough

Q.3: If by change you mean the changes our society has to make to have the best chance of saving our children from catastrophic climate change then essentially we need to enact an overhaul of our economy at least on the scale of WW2 mobilisation, both halting emissions of greenhouse gases and removing as many historical emissions from the atmosphere as possible. This means, among other things, an effective end to the consumer economy, and tree planting, etc, on a near-unimaginable scale - both of these delivered with an almost unprecedented urgency.

Politically, for what it's worth, I have never been particularly radical. Certainly I would welcome the restoration of natural ecosystems, but none of this fits any pre-existing political agenda of mine, nor does it bring me any pleasure to write.

Dave Campbell

Q.3: Sweeping fundamental change to the way we live life, from transport to diet. We have to be progressive about how we do things. Looking to the future, not dwelling in the past. The younger generation have to decide this; we are leaving them in a truly dire situation.

Rob Proctor

Q.3: It's a big change and we are going to see big changes in the way that we live. Some of these changes we won't really notice - e.g. switching to renewable energy. Some will be beneficial for us -e.g. making our homes energy efficient, saving us money and making our homes warmer. Some may seem like a big change but could actually improve our lives - e.g creating more wild, natural spaces through tree planting, etc; or reducing traffic and car use in our towns and cities and creating space for people. Others will be harder: will we be able to fly



on holiday in the future? (something many of us have given up); how can we change our diets to consume much less meat? We will need to consume much, much less and we cannot continue to have such a culture of waste.

It will never be possible to make the changes we need to see if it is left to individual choices. We need strong government policy to make it easy for us to switch. For example, governments expect individuals to make good choices about what they buy. But why does our system make it so easy (and cheap) for people to make harmful choices? Why can governments not rule that any electrical item must last at least 10-20 years and be fully recyclable or repairable? Why should the companies that create products with large amounts of waste not have to pay for the waste they produce? The companies make vast profits, while we, taxpayers, pay for the clean-up and the recycling through our council tax. Companies would soon come up with innovative solutions to dealing with waste if it was them paying for its disposal. We give subsidies to farmers, so why not use those subsidies to encourage farmers to develop regenerative agricultural techniques that build and replenish the soil, rather than depleting it?

How are we going to pay for the change we need? The same way we are paying for the pandemic. Governments can borrow really cheaply. Investing in renewables, energy efficient homes, cycle routes, woodlands, etc etc, are all really good investments and will provide a return on any investment. We also have £100s of billions in pension funds that are mostly investing in companies that are having a negative impact on our environment. Why not invest it in something that will create a better future?

We can divert money we are already spending – for example, farm subsidies could support regenerative agriculture; road building budgets could be spent on public transport; we could put the cost of dealing with waste onto companies, rather than on individuals through their council tax.

The recent Climate Change Committee report reckons that getting to net zero is much cheaper than we thought and will only cost around 1% of our GDP:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/12/reaching-uk-net-zero-target-cheaper-than-we-thought-says-climate-adviser>

At the moment, although things have shifted considerably in the last 2 years, we are still a very long way from delivering the changes we need to see, and that is why the conversations you will be having as a citizens' assembly are so important. We need these honest conversations to be happening throughout the world.

For me, we have seen from the pandemic what is important in life. Connections with other people, our key workers, our health, the natural environment, a safe warm place to live. If we start making decisions based on people's wellbeing, that treat people with dignity and fairness, then even if we have to give up some things, we will all feel better. An example in my workplace was a policy that rewarded staff for not flying on holiday by giving them extra day's leave if they didn't fly.

It will be different, but it doesn't have to be worse. It will be a lot worse if we don't tackle climate change and the ecological crisis.



**Cynulliad Hinsawdd
Climate Assembly**

Pam Williams

For activists, under the new policing bill, almost certain arrest and possible time in prison, fines, being hated by some people.

For everyone, we'll have to learn to live simpler lives, give up or minimise meat-eating, be as self-sufficient as possible, take public transport rather than a car, upcycle, reuse, mend, change our collective mindset on "impressing" others/not be swayed by advertising.

David Williams

Q.3: We're going to have to stick our necks out and really make the general public know, by our disruptive and, possibly, illegal actions, that we take this climate crisis seriously enough to put ourselves on the line. I admit that I'm afraid of doing some of this, but as I get older, I - like others - feel that I have no alternative.

Tom Evans

Q.3: I personally can't imagine what the future may or may not look like, I can only see the injustice and pain that's currently being experienced by fellow humans because of the unfolding crisis: the climate and war refugees drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, the fathers who play games with their children to distract them during airstrikes in Syria, those being starved in Yemen, crop failures, unjust and unfair systems disproportionately affecting people of colour. What I do know is that electric cars and more recycling are not going to save us. The days of individual action are past.



Question 4. Who are the (top 100) companies/where are they based? How are these relevant to BG?

Sian Cox

The info I gave you comes from a report by the Carbon Disclosure Project in 2017. It looked at total carbon dioxide and methane emissions from industrial processes since the industrial revolution; the current and accumulated emissions in the atmosphere. (CO₂ remains in the atmosphere for hundreds of years, and about 20% of it is up there for thousands of years. This is one of the reasons we have to stop emitting it immediately – the billions of tonnes already up there are going to carry on heating the Earth long after we stop). Of that total accumulated amount, 78% are from humans burning fossil fuels; and 71% of those trace back to 100 fossil fuel companies; the companies who explore and drill for, extract, refine and sell (and lobby for) fossil fuels. The CDP report found that: ‘The fossil fuel industry and its products accounted for 91% of global industrial GHGs in 2015, and about 70% of all anthropogenic (human-caused) GHG emissions’.

The companies are listed in the report. Here’s a link to the report:

<https://b8f65cb373b1b7b15feb-c70d8ead6ced550b4d987d7c03fcdd1d.ssl.cf3.rackcdn.com/cms/reports/documents/000/002/327/original/Carbon-Majors-Report-2017.pdf?1499691240>

Here are links to a newspaper article and a fact-checker article about the report:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/100-companies-responsible-71-cent-greenhouse-gas-emissions-global-warming-climate-change-shell-bp-chevron-a7834031.html>

And <https://fullfact.org/news/are-100-companies-causing-71-carbon-emissions/>

But there are overlaps. For example, 20-25% of global emissions are related to agriculture. Of that 20-25%, some emissions are from deforestation, some from the mass ploughing of soils, some from the use of agricultural chemicals, some from the animals themselves (farting methane!), and some from the machinery and industrial processes used for those practices, which are all fuelled by fossil fuels. So some of that 15% overlaps with the 71%.

But it’s also about how those companies are enabled to do what they do. And that’s banks, through loans; financial institutions (such as pensions holders), through investments; and governments, through subsidies. The world’s 33 biggest banks and financial institutions have invested \$1.9 trillion in fossil fuel industries since the Paris Agreement. Fossil fuel industries plan to invest \$4.9 trillion in more exploration, drilling and extraction between 2030 and 2040, and that money will be provided by banks and financial institutions. UK banks HSBC and Barclays have between them invested £158 billion in fossil fuels since Paris. That’s our money, customers’ savings, being used to destroy our grandchildren’s futures; with the help (by subsidisation and by deregulation) of our government, which is supposed to represent us, and make decisions for the common good of its citizens.

Their profits arise in large part from the fact that we, consumers, are buying their products, of course. But the system shapes and directs us to keep doing that. Our lives are shaped by what governments choose to subsidise, promote and enable, and what they choose to ignore. New



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oil wells instead of renewable energy, for example; the car and aviation industries instead of local public transport systems. XR insist that ordinary people should not be made to feel that their choices are responsible for the crisis and that the solution lies in them making different choices; that's a smokescreen perpetrated by the huge corporations to enable them to carry on doing what they're doing. We need government action – legislation – to address this huge, complex problem.

Why is it relevant to Blaenau Gwent?

We're all tied up in this system that we can't control. So: No matter what Blaenau Gwent Council do, no matter how brilliant, progressive and fair their actions might be, those actions won't save Blaenau Gwent's grandchildren. Because BG's grandchildren will be living in climate and nature breakdown, which will happen all over the world, because of the refusal of national governments to prevent it. The climate and nature crisis is now so critical, and we're so dangerously close to tipping points that we won't be able to come back from, that we don't have time to wait for local councils, one by one, to make local changes that build up to a solution in the distant future. Progressive council action in Blaenau Gwent won't make BG a small oasis of temperate weather, where crops grow as they always have done, and the seasons remain stable while weather everywhere else is unpredictable and extreme. Just as the inhabitants of small islands in the Pacific have emitted hardly any GHGs and haven't caused the problem, but are losing their lands, homes and countries to sea level rise. Just as farmers on the plains of Africa and India have emitted hardly any GHGs and haven't caused the problem, but are watching their herds perish in scorching droughts and are being forced to migrate as their lands become uninhabitable. Weather *everywhere* will be unpredictable and extreme. Crops will fail in all the lands from whom we buy food, including our own. So it's relevant to all of us.

Dave France

Q.4: We're often told that the crisis is 'our fault' as normal people, but I recently learned that 7 of the 10 biggest companies in Europe are fossil fuel companies. It's lobbying and pressure from such companies that keeps the economy carbon-based, in Wales and around the world.

Rob Proctor

Q.4: Revealed – the capitalist network that runs the world: New Scientist:

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21228354-500-revealed-the-capitalist-network-that-runs-the-world/>

We need to become more local and provide as many of our goods and services locally as possible. Welsh Government is doing a lot on this through their foundation economy work. It is all about community wealth building and the more we do locally the more money we can keep in our local economies. The Preston Model is often referred to as a good example of this and something that could really be done in BG: <https://www.preston.gov.uk/article/1339/What-is-Preston-Model->



Question 5. How does XR deal with negative publicity?

Sian Cox

We accept it. Firstly, we're causing disruption to ordinary people, who are under all the usual pressures – busy, overworked, overstretched, stressed, in debt, worried about their kids or their boss or their bills, all that stuff. They're entitled to be angry with us.

Secondly, the press likes to publish negative stories – they make attention-grabbing headlines.

Thirdly, the mainstream press in the UK (all of it except The Guardian) is owned by billionaire businessmen who profit from the system that XR is trying to change. They don't want us to succeed. They don't want their readers to agree with us. So what you see in the mainstream press is a snapshot that distorts the truth, focusing on the disruption without explaining the reason for it; publishing pictures that make it look like we're just having a big street party at the expense of ordinary people trying to get to work; and headline claims that our blockade of the News Corp printworks was 'an attack on the free press'.

So we don't expect fair and accurate reporting. And we can't do anything about the negative publicity. It is what it is. We just have to keep on peacefully sticking spanners in the system's works, peacefully and respectfully telling the truth.

Sue Lewis

Q.5: XR's main aim is to raise the alarm about the climate and nature emergency, not to be popular. When you see negative publicity, the first thing is to look at where it's coming from. The big newspapers and tv companies are likely to either ignore us or give us negative publicity, because we're drawing attention to their failure to properly inform the public, to the way that they hide the truth, or even publish downright lies in some cases.

XR puts out press statements to try and deal with negative publicity and explain our view – you can read them on the main XR UK website, here: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/press/>

However, it's always important to look at negative publicity to see if there is anything we can learn from it. Sometimes we may do the wrong thing, or explain ourselves poorly, even if for the right motives. We're members of the public too, and we're only human!

Dave France

Q.5: Negative publicity? For XR?? Never!

On a serious note, we do usually get negative coverage in the media, and it is hard to deal with sometimes. I try to remember that most social movements aren't popular at the time they occur - like the Suffragettes for example - but they still make valuable and long-lasting changes in the world.



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Tom Bullough

Q.5: You just have to wear it and continue to be as respectful and responsible yourself as you can. It goes without saying that we all might want the changes we need to make globally to not apply to us, and many or most of us will fight our corner to continue to live as we do. Either XR makes no impact or it faces criticism. Given that choice, negative publicity must be a positive sign of a sort.

Rob Proctor

Q.5: We understand that we are involved in a power struggle between those in power who have done very well out of the status quo and those trying to deliver change.

80% of the media in this country is owned by 5 billionaires that have done very well out of the status quo and don't want to give up power or control (<https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FINALonline2.pdf>)

So it is no wonder we often get negative press. However, our experience of talking to people is very different. We get huge amounts of support from people who know something needs to be done. Yes there are many people who are also annoyed by what we do but even they regularly acknowledge that something needs to be done but say they just don't agree with our tactics.

We act peacefully, non-violently, and we are genuinely sorry when we cause disruption, but we have got to a point where all other avenues have been unsuccessful and we feel that we have been left with no choice. We have really strong support networks in XR, and we support each other through the challenging situations we find ourselves in.

Tom Evans

Q.5: We aren't here to be liked; those days have passed. I don't mean this to sound confrontational and it certainly isn't meant that way. Negative publicity is unfortunately par for the course; the media and press are part of the system that's choking this planet and choking the natural systems that keep us alive. Some XR actions are designed to invoke an emotional response, to shake people from their comfortable mindsets. The real problem with negative publicity is it can harden the stance of those on the right that reject the science and want to keep the system the way it is.

Dave Campbell

Q.5: We are not in this to make friends. The world is on fire. XR has brought climate awareness to the forefront of people's minds.

The marketing industry has a very famous saying: "there's no such thing as bad publicity". Some of the membership of XR seem to want to apologise all the time and never upset anyone. I make no apology. The day my daughter came to me and told me that she wasn't going to have children because of the climate situation was the day I became an activist.



The right wing media will negatively spin whatever we do, to keep the status quo. I have no qualms about negative publicity.

Pam Williams

Q.5. XR often turns the negative publicity around. For example, when asked to explain the disruption it causes by closing roads, XR explains that in raising awareness using disruption, the impact is trivial compared to the disruption being caused and that will be caused by the impacts of climate change (flooding, wildfires, crop failures, food shortages and societal breakdown, etc).

David Williams

No publicity is bad if you can re-frame any criticism to back up your reasons for demonstrating the need for rapid action against the threat of the climate emergency. Most criticism stems from uneasiness at our message. OK, we are disruptive - but that's part of our non-violent direct action DNA.

Question 6. Does ER have any links to groups in BG to encourage people to get active and force change?

Sian Cox

There are no XR groups in BG... yet! Before lockdown hit, a number of us from groups around the valleys – Brecon, Abergavenny and Cardiff – had started a project to give public talks in towns in BG and Caerphilly and, if people who came wanted us to, to help them set up local XR groups. We've had to put it on the back burner for now. But if any of you would like to set up a group, we'll help you. Some of us started our local groups. Rob started Abergavenny; I started Brecon. You could get to know us now, on Zoom, then we could get together in person after lockdown, if by then you'd like that. If you don't want to set a group up but would like to join an existing one, you're welcome to join one of ours'. You don't have to live locally to join a group; especially with things as they are, and everything online.

Rob Proctor

Q.6: There are people from Blaenau Gwent involved in groups like Cardiff and Abergavenny. Many XR groups have strong links with FOE, Transition, other environmental groups.

It's been very difficult with Covid to keep momentum going but hopefully with COP 26 coming up there will be renewed action.

XR has grown by people taking the initiative and setting up their own local groups. There is lots of support and experience available to draw on.



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Tom Evans

Q.6: We have tried to start a group in Newport and will try again as Covid restrictions ease and we can plan actions. There are lots of other groups like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace who are active in the south Wales regions. We demand change; our future must be decided by us the people.

David Williams

Q.6: You can look out for Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and so forth, as well as XR. BG is in the South Wales East region for the Senedd elections. The Wales Green Party is hoping to win its first Senedd seat in the regional elections and, I expect, they would be very keen to help out in BG with any outcome from the CA - especially on climate issues.

Question 7. Actions from this group (XR) can sometimes be viewed as having a negative effect - how can you change my mind to be part of this group.

Sian Cox

I would say, dig beneath the surface of what you read in the mainstream press. Come and talk to us! Make your own minds up, from your personal experience of talking with us, hearing about why we're doing what we're doing and reading what we, and the thousands of climate, ecology and social change experts whose expertise our approach is based on, have to say.

Read our website: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/>

Watch our videos on YouTube. If you put 'Extinction Rebellion' in the search bar, you'll bring up our own YouTube channel somewhere in the listing; but there are also lots of videos made by XR loose on YouTube. Real Media, the independent news organisation, always give us fair coverage, and their stuff is on YouTube, too.

Read our personal statements and stories, XR members from all over the UK, on this Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/468678977056685/>

We're thousands of ordinary people, from all walks of life and different backgrounds, with different political views, different life experiences, united by our shared belief in the three demands, and our shared commitment to peaceful civil disobedience.

But not everyone in XR actually commits the civil disobedience. XR folk all around the country are doing all sorts of things to support the effort. It's a gigantic team effort. We have people, in their local groups and/or on the big actions, making banners, making food, sharing Facebook posts, moderating social media pages, speaking to the press, writing press releases, handing out flyers, delivering the XR talks online or, when not in lockdown, in their local community centres or to their work colleagues or to other groups they're members of; people manage their local group's money, or write their stories for our blogs and Facebook pages; or visit their MPs or Senedd members; or lobby their local council to declare a climate emergency; and we have people who just support us, by being there for us, walking our dogs when we're away on long



actions, or bringing us cups of tea or food when we're glued to buildings or blockading roads. And all sorts of other things. Whatever skills you have, whatever interests, whatever you like doing, we can use it!

Dave France

Q.7: It's nice to hear you're considering joining XR! Our movement is based on the study of past movements, who generally use methods of nonviolent disruption to achieve change. Historically, those methods aren't popular but they do work. We often hear people saying 'I agree with what you're saying but not with your methods'. Of course, if we'd used non-disruptive methods (like writing to our MP) then people never would have heard what we had to say in the first place!

Rob Proctor

Q.7: XR is full of people that care passionately about trying to tackle and prevent the worst impacts of the climate and ecological crisis we are facing. We are ordinary people that care so much we are often willing to put our liberty at risk to try and deliver change. Not everyone is willing or able to put themselves in that position but for every person that is willing to be arrested or imprisoned for their actions we need several people to provide support to them and their families.

This is all much bigger than XR. The important thing is that we act and we do what is necessary to deliver this change, whether it is through XR or by some other means. We all have a part to play. But the most important thing is that we are truthful with ourselves and others about the situation we are facing and what is required to deal with it.

Tom Evans

Q.7: When it looks as though an XR action is having a negative effect, you have to pause and wonder why this action was taken; why does a person risk arrest or imprisonment? Why are ordinary people taking extraordinary measures to sound the alarm? Try and look past the initial outrage, and consider the source of the negative viewpoint. I witnessed this in the Rebellion in London in April 2019. I was shaken to see people being arrested on mass without resistance or complaint. I watched a police officer push over a protestor and drag her to the side of the road, and the rebels who witnessed this remained non-violent. That is key to everything that XR does: Non Violent Direct Action (NVDA) is our only chance of surviving.

Sue Lewis

Q.7: I've got 5 precious grandchildren – the youngest is 3, the oldest is 9 (in 2 families).

But here's the thing - my concern for their future is what brought me into the climate movement. What keeps me here is what I've learned about the injustices to children globally in the here and now, as well as in the future. We have to move beyond our own backyard.



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Pam Williams

Q.7: By listening to XR rebels and hearing their stories, by informing oneself about climate change and recognising the part we can each play.

David Williams

Q.7: As for Q.5, above, in sticking our heads above the parapet on climate issues, XR is bound to draw fire and criticism. We're not terrorists or extremists - just ordinary folks worried about our children's and grand-children's future, and who believe the government is doing b*gg*r all about it.

Tom Bullough

Q.7: This is a very difficult question. It might be that, in the end, the change would have to come from yourself. Firstly, though, I would ask you to become acquainted with the basic facts of the climate and ecological crisis, to face them fully and honestly. I would also ask you to accept that this crisis is happening now. Consider 2020 in the South Wales Valleys: a February of catastrophic flooding, followed by the arrival of an even more catastrophic pandemic. These disasters - extreme rainfall and a zoonotic virus deriving from the destruction of natural habitats - are both symptoms of the climate and ecological crisis: a crisis which, as temperatures rise, will only become more acute. I would then ask you to consider why you work and live. If, in any way, your answer involves children, people or places that you love, then I would have to ask how you could not make efforts to save them? It is true that there are those who will present XR in a negative light, but XR remains demonstrably the most effective group of activists in the UK. For me, really, the question is how can you bear not to be involved - not to have as great an effect on securing our future as you can?