

# NOTES

from the

## INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION CAFÉ ON CLIMATE

at

[Sir John Lawes School – Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023](#)



Abigail Riley hosted the meeting – and opened it by introducing the youngest panellist, Georgina Atterbury, who urged us to make it cheaper to access low-carbon technology. She also complained that we all buy plastic water bottles, most of which will end up in landfill – and some will end up in the ocean as micro-plastics. Very dangerous – and should be stopped.

**David Woollcombe** urged young people to [Grab the Wheel](#) – take control of Planet Earth, before current leaders drive us over the cliff – beyond the the points of no return. How? He urges us to do one thing differently from the earlier generation: prosecute governments that break their promises and – if found guilty – lock ‘em up! They are an existential danger to themselves and future generations.

Daniel Grace bitterly resented that we have already put more carbon into the atmosphere than it can possibly absorb, that there is more plastic than fish in the sea – and that it is all horrendous for the planet. We have to buy less plastic – and legislation can help that: When was the last time you saw a plastic straw? Ages ago – because governments have banned them;

Angie Duncan pointed out that, in the next two decades, people will die; polluting countries will have to pay reparations;



*The three Elder Panellists: David Woollcombe, Dylan Katuwawala and Kimberley Hare*

**Kimberley Hare**, from [HEART Hertfordshire](#), introduced her community group: Hertfordshire Enabling & Adopting Resilience Together (HEART) – which works with schools and communities across Herts. She reminded us of the James Baldwin quote: *“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but NOTHING can be changed until it is faced....”*

A follower of [Rupert Read](#), Kim believes that young people want us to tell them the truth – and the truth is it is not enough to ‘Do things differently...’ that is the wrong question. We are in Overshoot! We have crossed

the Planetary Boundaries. We've blown through the 1.5 degree threshold. Forget minutes to midnight – we're at 5 minutes past midnight already! Don't worry if you find that news upsetting: you should be upset! You should feel Climate Grief – if you don't you're probably a psychopath! But don't wallow in your grief for too long. Let that grief spur you to action, for there is much we can do at a community level.

1. We must save everything we can
2. We must soften the landing into the new climate reality we are heading towards through resilience
3. We must build up that resilience – both within our selves and our spirits but also outside in our communities
4. We must imagine the world as we'd like it to be – in our minds and in our hearts – and work towards that
5. We must face the future square on and make our own choices between the three alternatives:
  - ONE: Dystopia – which is where Business as Usual is rapidly taking us
  - TWO: The PHOENIX Future – where capitalism will die, or will implode – and some thing new will rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes;
  - THREE: The BUTTERFLY Future – where we imagine something beautiful emerging from the current chaos and put all our energy into making it happen. (Kim's preferred future!)

Remember what Rob Hopkins, founder of the Transition Towns movement, said: "If we wait for governments to do it, it will be too late; if we do it alone, it will be too little; but if we do it together, as communities, we may just be able to crack it!"

Final point: just the facts is not enough – they deaden young minds; you have to talk about it – think about it with the people you love; create that paradigm shift in your own mind – and then nurture it in those around you!

**The Final Youth Speaker, Ruth ??**, told that she had been a Climate Sceptic – she could not see the point of climate Action. But – after researching the issues, she came to understand that climate change could only be addressed by community dialogue. Informed dialogue, in her opinion, is the only way forward as UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, has been saying for a while now.

**Dylan Katuwawala**, Principle Climate Change Officer from Luton Borough Council, was the final elder speaker, and he reported that Councils across the UK have now got the message and are beginning to do stuff. That is reflected in voter priorities too – the aspiration to drive your car to the shop is just not there so much now. Councils are driving incremental change in the 3 x main carbon creating areas:

1. Homes
2. Transportation
3. Office and Factory Buildings & Institutions

Like this school: you could insist on light sensors in your corridors, solar voltaics on your roofs. Push for it as, right now, solar is the cheaper option. You will be pushing in a direction that your management wants to go. YES! – councils are behind the curve, but they all now get the urgency – and we're working on it. Support us!

*We then broke down into 4 x Tables for the Conversation Café. Several people mentioned that – for a subject of this importance – the turn-out was very low – and mostly female. (Very few men in the room). But there were lively conversations at each table – and the report-backs were rich in ideas and suggestions.*

**Table ONE: Georgina and Kim:** The Climate Action Group should do more work in the community to get people to use less plastic, and eat less junk food. Tell more personal stories – don't rely on tech solutions. Prepare for mitigation and adaptation – because we can never get back to where we were.

**Table TWO:** Youth < - ? - > was interested to hear from an elder about the situation during the war – when there was no plastic. For them – the plastic food containers, when they came in the '50s, were the 'wonderstuff.' Back then, it would have seemed totally weird to talk about the environment or climate. Tonight – it was entirely natural. Necessary. And it's great to hear the truth – and we can shoulder the blame. But where does that get us? Not very far – it's stupid to waste time on blame games: let us all take the blame – and work together for solutions.

**Table THREE: Ruth ?? and David W:** Ruth reported on the disconnect in politics – the crisis in the channels of political authority. They're broken. This table suggested more Deliberative Democracy – Citizens Assemblies, or Peace Child's Model Citizen Assemblies – with a commitment by government, local or national, to take action as a result. And reduce the power of big interest groups: put power back in people's hands – especially young people. Lower the voting age to 16. And change the Curriculum to put these issues at the heart of every child's learning. David added the point that Electric vehicles (EVs) ran the risk of

exchanging one extractive industry (oil, gas) for another (lithium, rare earths). He also added that the worst consequence of the broken politics is the lack of TRUST in Democracy. Inequality is endemic – and people no longer feel secure or happy. Working together in communities – is the only way to go, as Rob Hopkins says.

**Table FOUR:** Abi Riley reported that they had talked about the need to shift resources towards sustainable solutions: how come the government had been able to find £150 billion for COVID furlough but could not find £78bn. for retrofitting buildings to be sustainable. The impacts of growth – and negative impacts of climate change – are affecting everyone, but just not equally.

A young boy piped up to say that everyone recognises that climate is a problem, but just not their No. 1 problem. For them, doing their homework, passing exams, avoiding a detention... They are No. 1 problems! Climate is something they can sweep under the carpet for the by the time a teacher gets round to teaching it, it's just one thing amongst many to be concerned about. But it is important – and he wants it to be raised up the curriculum priority list.

Georgina added: "I welcome all this talk about children getting educated – but what about getting the elders educated?!" (Big round of applause)

Dylan closed out the evening with a Question: *"What are you guys doing HERE? – right here in your school?"*

There is so much that you could be doing here:

- Re-use school uniforms
- Get Solar PVs on the roof
- Motion sensor light switches in all the corridors and classrooms
- Vegetarian diet in the school canteen

Local authorities – like his – are keen to help you get started. Because, once you get a taste for taking action, and see the results it can bring, you and all your peers will be motivated to do more!