



Older People and Climate Change: the Case for Better Engagement

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CCC	Committee on Climate Change
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DTI	Department for Trade and Industry
GAD	Government Actuary Department
GHG	Greenhouse gases
HM	Her Majesty's
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NCC	National Consumer Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RSVP	Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature
UK	United Kingdom

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SUMMARY

Climate change and an ageing population will have wide ranging socio-economic and environmental impacts. Public engagement is therefore critical to implementing policies to tackle climate change and to address the needs of an ageing population. This report presents the case for better engagement of older people on climate change issues in particular, and environmental issues in general. Older people may be physically, financially and emotionally less resilient to the effects of climate change. At the same time baby boomers are bringing higher levels of consumption to middle and later life. They currently have the highest carbon footprint of any other age group.

While older people are concerned about climate change, they do not feel they will be directly

affected. Nor do they feel they can personally take action to stop it. Older people want to do their bit to tackle climate change and reduce their carbon emissions but there is uncertainty over which actions are best to take. There are only a handful of national initiatives engaging older people on green issues.

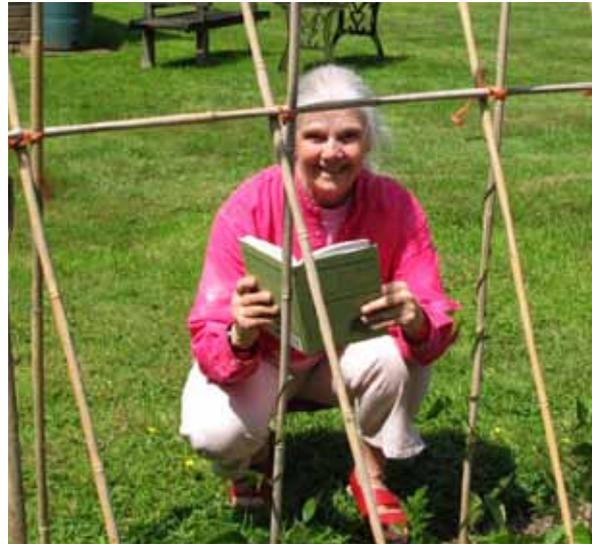
The report calls for old stereotypes of this age group, as being incapable of engagement, passive or disinterested, to be abandoned. It recommends new approaches to engage older people on climate change issues which promote direct interaction and the use of trusted agents that are sensitive to the personal circumstances faced at their particular stage of life. It outlines ten recommendations to improve and enhance the engagement of older people on issues related to climate change and greener living.



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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the coming decades climate change and an ageing population will have wide ranging socio-economic and environmental impacts. Public engagement is therefore critical to implementing policies to tackle climate change and to address the needs of an ageing population. Approximately 42 per cent of UK carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions result directly from actions taken by individuals (DTI, 2007). If all emissions resulting from UK consumption are considered, individuals are directly responsible for approximately 76 per cent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Druckman and Jackson, 2009). How we communicate information on climate change and engage with different social groups on the issue, will determine whether we can meet national GHG targets, promote greener lifestyles and make the transition to a low carbon economy.



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Climate change is expected to have adverse effects on natural and human systems although the risk and harm resulting from climate change will not be evenly distributed. Certain groups in society will be affected more than others. These groups will tend to be already socially deprived due to poor health, quality of housing and mobility. Older people in particular are a vulnerable group that may be physically, financially and emotionally less resilient to deal with a changing climate (Haq *et al.*, 2008). They may be unaware of climate change risks and often lack the social support network to enable them to adapt to change (SNIFFER, 2009). A survey of older people's perception of health-related risks to heatwaves found that few respondents considered themselves either old or at risk from the effects of heat (Abrahamson *et al.*, 2009).

It is therefore vital that decision-makers at the national and local level address the issue of equity and social justice in the development and implementation of measures to reduce GHG emissions. This will require using innovative information dissemination methods to increase awareness of vulnerability as well as developing plans so that older people can adapt better to a changing climate to ensure that are not disproportionately or unfairly affected.

Older people are making up an increasing proportion of the UK population. By 2050 people aged over 50 will represent 30 per cent of the UK population compared to approximately 20 per cent in 2006 (see figure 1) (GAD, 2007). This demographic group has often been viewed as a group which cannot perform

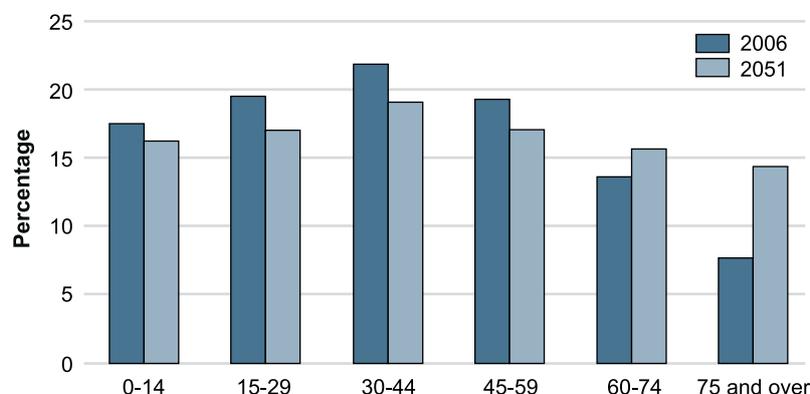


Figure 1: Percentage of the UK population by age in 2006 and 2051

Source: GAD (2007)

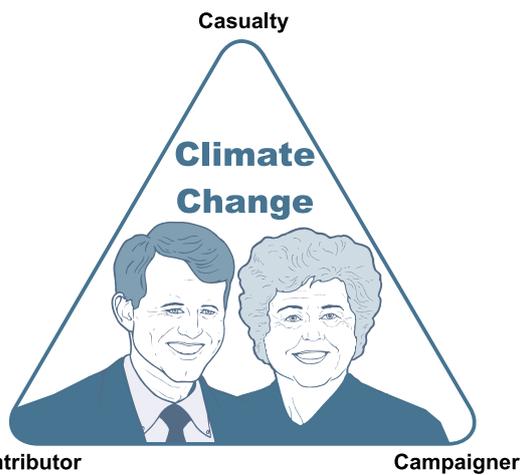


Figure 2: Climate change and older people

certain skills and activities (Reed *et al.*, 2008) or are passive, incapable and withdrawn (Day, 2008).

The engagement and participation of older people in climate change issues are important as older people can be seen as potential contributors to, and casualties of, climate change as well as potential campaigners to tackle the problem (see figure 2). Therefore developing different approaches and providing the opportunities to engage older people on climate change issues are essential to tackle the two challenges of the 21st Century – a changing climate and an ageing population.

This report sets out the case for better engagement of older people on climate change in particular and on environmental issues in general.



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2 CARBON FOOTPRINT OF OLDER PEOPLE

In 2007 the Stockholm Environment Institute published the report *Greening the Greys: Climate Change and the Over 50s* which presented the results of the first assessment of age-related carbon footprint in the UK together with analysis of attitudes to climate change. The report divided the over 50s into three distinct groups: baby boomers (50-64), seniors (65-74) and elders (75+). Based on household expenditure by age and associated carbon emissions the report determined average carbon footprint of each age group.

The analysis of the age-related carbon footprint has been updated using an improved methodology and most recently available data. Table 1 shows the average carbon footprint for each age group (Haq *et al.*, 2009).

Table 1: Average carbon footprint by group

Group	Average carbon footprint
Baby boomers	13.5 CO ₂ tonnes/per capita
Seniors	12.9 CO ₂ tonnes/per capita
Elders	12.0 CO ₂ tonnes/per capita

These results are not dissimilar from the 2007 calculations (see figure 3). However, in order to understand the variation of the carbon footprint within the three age groups a further level of analysis was undertaken to examine the main lifestyle group that form each age category.

HIGH FOOTPRINT LIFESTYLES

The baby boomers have the highest proportion of people with high footprint lifestyles (see table 2).

Table 2: Proportion with high footprint lifestyle by group

Group	Proportion of high footprint lifestyles
Baby boomers	46%
Seniors	43%
Elders	35%

This high footprint lifestyle group tends to have a carbon footprint of more than 13 tonnes in each age category. They include professional individuals who have a successful career (e.g. senior manager positions, successful entrepreneurs) and successful white collar workers (e.g. sales representatives, hospital administrators, independent building and decorating contractors) and pensioners who own their homes and who have some source of income beyond the basic state pension.

The successful professionals are enjoying the fruits of previous years of hard work. They have reached a stage in their life in which enjoyment of consumption and of leisure time are now more evenly balanced with the demands of work. These individuals are now able to afford to move to sought after locations, drive

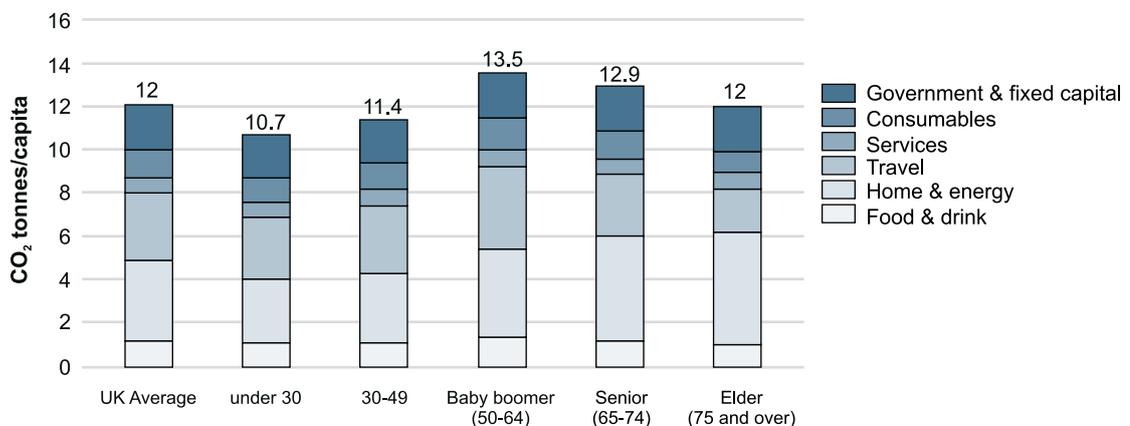


Figure 3: The UK carbon footprint by age

more modern and expensive cars and who enjoy exotic leisure pursuits. Most, though not all, appear to enjoy stable household arrangements.

The successful white collar workers have established themselves and their families in comfortable homes in mature suburbs. Children are becoming more independent, work is becoming less of a challenge and interest payments on homes and other loans are becoming less burdensome. With more time and money on their hands, people can relax and focus on activities that they find intrinsically rewarding.

Quite often, those with a high footprint lifestyle, on their retirement, may have decided to sell their suburban homes and to relocate to a coastal resort or to a pleasant heritage town or rural village. At these locations they enjoy the company of other people in similar circumstances and with similar values to their own.

LOW FOOTPRINT LIFESTYLES

The elders have the highest proportion of people with low footprint lifestyles (see table 3).

Table 3: Proportion with low footprint lifestyle by group

Group	Proportion with low footprint lifestyles
Baby boomers	10%
Seniors	12%
Elders	15%

The low footprint lifestyle group tends to have a carbon footprint of less than 10 tonnes in each age category. They are mostly reliant on state benefits, and live in housing designed by local authorities and housing associations.

On account of their low incomes, individuals in this low footprint group participate only at the margins of the modern consumer society. Elderly people in this group are mostly reliant on state benefits, and live in housing designed by local authorities and housing associations. Some live in old people’s homes or sheltered accommodation, while others live in small bungalows, set in small enclaves within larger council estates. Most of these people spend money only on the basic necessities of life. This group has reached the later stages of previously independent lives and now requires the support of housing and social services departments.

REPLACEMENT EFFECT

Baby boomers have the highest carbon footprint compared to other age groups. As the baby boomers move into the older groups they will replace low carbon footprint habits and values with relatively high consumption habits. They represent the first generation of the consumer society entering old age. This “replacement effect” is crucially important and identifies the need for a much clearer targeted effort on climate change and consumption aimed at this demographic group

Baby boomers that are currently entering retirement may be the last that will be able to maintain a relatively high level of consumption in their later years due to the uncertainty associated with future pension schemes. Whether the current baby boomers will want, or be able to maintain, their high levels of consumption, will be dependent on a number of factors including levels of pension income, changes in behaviour resulting from current campaigns, level of health and fitness and future government policy regulating behaviour.

There is a real need to target this group with specific suggestions for lowering their carbon footprint and with specific policies that link personal and governmental action in an effort to produce virtuous behavioural change that appeals to this age group.



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3 THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

There is no single solution to combat the causes and consequences of climate change and similarly no one group, person or country can do it alone. Changes in individual behaviour are an important part of the mix of responses required by government, business, countries and institutions. However, different groups within the population have different values, attitudes and understanding of the issue. Therefore the challenges associated with changing individual attitudes and behaviour should not be underestimated. Understanding how and why decisions are made and the willingness and potential to change the way we live is critical to achieving sustained attitudinal and behavioural change (Bedford *et al.*, 2004; Jackson, 2005; OECD, 2002; Sanne, 2002). Since almost all aspects of our daily lives contribute to GHG emissions, it is necessary to demonstrate that everyone can make a difference whatever their personal, social or economic circumstances.

The lifestyles we lead are made up of the different personal practices that allow us to differentiate ourselves from others in society (Campbell, 1998, Chaney, 1996). The largest environmental impacts of day-to-day personal actions are associated with housing, food, energy and personal travel (Gronco and Warde, 2001; Lorek and Spangenberg, 2001; Spangenberg and Lorek, 2002). These activities generate waste and polluting emissions that are a major cause of environmental degradation and contribute to global climate change (OECD, 2002; WWF, 2007; Zacarias-Farah and Geyer-Allely, 2003). Table 4 presents the different actions individuals can take to lead a greener lifestyle.

A number of socio-economic and cultural factors can shape and constrain an individual's decision to engage in environmentally friendly behaviour (Burgess, 2003; Costanzo *et al.*, 1986; Hinchliffe, 1996; Holdsworth and Steedman, 2005; Whitelegg,

Table 4: Actions for a greener lifestyle

Energy	Food and Products	Transport	Water	Waste
Switch from electric to gas cookers and condensing boilers	Reduce meat and dairy consumption	Modal shift or reduce air travel	Fit a toilet water-saving device	Recycle household waste
Insulate homes and fit double glazing	Reduce fish consumption and purchase fish from sustainable stocks	Modal shift from cars to public transport	Install low flow taps and showers	Dispose of toxic materials safely
Reduce temperature of the home environment	Purchase locally grown produce	Walking and cycling short distances	Reduce use of water (e.g. car washing, lawn sprinklers, dish washers)	Compost organic waste
Purchase energy efficient appliances and do not leave appliances in standby mode	Reduce levels of highly processed food	Using smaller, fuel efficient cars and car share		
Reduce temperature of wash cycles to 40°C	Purchase certified sustainable wood and paper products			
	Living in multiple person households			

Source: based on Bedford *et al.* (2004)



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1993; Whitelegg and Haq, 2003). Approaches to achieving environmentally friendly behavioural change include top down mass information and awareness campaigns directed at the whole population such as the UK government's energy saving/environmental campaigns: "Save It" (mid-1970s), "Are You Doing Your Bit?" (late 1990s) and "Act on CO₂" (2007) (Hinchliffe, 1996; Owens, 2000). These campaigns aim to "educate" the public by providing information to allow rational decisions and behaviours. However, such campaigns tend to be intensive, limited in time and expensive. The top-down approach has been criticised for misunderstanding public perceptions of issues (Reed *et al.*, 2008; Owens, 2000). Factors that might influence a decision are often ignored, such as people's perception of sustainable goods and services as being more expensive; lack of awareness about how to become more sustainable; and mistrust of government bodies and businesses that promote lifestyle changes (Holdsworth and Steedman, 2005).

Whilst some national and local campaigns to change individual behaviour in relation to climate change have been successful, there has not been a significant increase in understanding and engagement (DEFRA, 2009). The issue has always suffered from a perception that its effects are distant in space and time. However, recent studies have indicated that the long-term trend in concern about climate change may have peaked three to four years ago (Department for Transport, 2010), and others have pointed to possible rising scepticism about the human causes of climate change (Whitmarsh, 2008).

The recent rise in climate change scepticism and waning interest may be linked to the public's changing priorities in a recession or to "issue fatigue" (Met Office, 2009). Climate sceptics drew attention to the contents of emails stolen from the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit leading to accusations, subsequently found to be

untrue, that a number of researchers had manipulated data. At the same time there was an admission by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading body for the assessment of the scientific evidence of climate change, that it incorrectly predicted that Himalayan glaciers could disappear by 2035 (IPCC, 2010)

Unsurprisingly, a BBC Poll conducted in February 2010 after the negative media coverage associated with events at University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit also suggested that scepticism about climate change is on the rise (BBC, 2010). Of those polled, 25 per cent did not think global warming was happening, and those who said that human-induced climate change was real had fallen from 83 to 75 per cent. Another survey undertaken indicated a fall from 91 per cent to 78 percent over a five year period (Spence *et al.*, 2010). Nonetheless, over half of those who took part considered it their responsibility to take action and believed that they could make a difference (Spence *et al.*, 2010).

However, this willingness of individuals to participate in environmentally friendly behaviour is dependent on an enabling and supportive structural framework provided by governments and the international community in order to collectively facilitate desired behaviour. Looking to such institutions and business to take the lead, is implicit in the "I will if you will" approach to sustainability (NCC, 2005). Whether or not public doubt about climate change is maintained in the long term, there is still a need to encourage behavioural change if the step change identified as necessary by the UK Government's independent Committee on Climate Change (CCC) to meet the national target of an 80 per cent reduction in GHG emissions, is to be achieved by 2050 (CCC, 2010).

Attempts to re-invigorate public participation and engagement on climate change should integrate the evaluation results of past interventions such as mass communication campaigns, or local community based initiatives. New and refined approaches should be considered to effectively re-engage key groups in society. Equally relevant is the backdrop of limited public sector finances for the foreseeable future, which brings into focus the need for new partnerships that allow local and central government to have a lower cost basis for delivery of messages and services. The Shaping our Future report (HM Government, 2010) outlines ways which this could be implemented in collaboration with the voluntary sector.

4 ATTITUDES OF OLDER PEOPLE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

An IPSOS MORI survey (2010) on the public perception of climate change conducted for the University of Cardiff (Spence *et al.*, 2010) found that:

- 24 per cent of over 55s felt climate change was *entirely* or *mainly* caused by natural processes compared with those under 55 (13.4 per cent).
- 68 per cent of 55-65s are either very or fairly concerned about climate change although 76 per cent of those younger than 55 fall into this category. A greater proportion of those aged 65-plus (36 per cent) compared to other age groups are either *not very* or *not at all* concerned about the issue.
- 44 per cent of over 55s do not feel that they will be affected by climate change compared to younger age groups (24 per cent).
- 32 per cent of over 55s tend to *disagree* or *strongly disagree* that they can personally help to reduce climate change by changing their behaviour compared to younger age groups (10 per cent).
- 60 per cent of over 55s *strongly agree* or *tend to agree* that it is hard to take action on climate change compared to younger age groups (52.6 per cent). In particular the 65-plus feel that they are unable to make a personal difference (46 per cent tend to *disagree* or *strongly disagree*) compared to other age groups (28 per cent).
- 33.5 per cent of over 55s think the international community should be responsible for taking action on climate change compared to younger age groups (27.2 per cent).

The survey demonstrates that while older people are concerned about climate change, this age group generally does not feel they will be affected. Nor do they feel that they are able personally to take action to stop it.



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5 CURRENT EFFORTS TO ENGAGE OLDER PEOPLE ON GREEN ISSUES

Many Government initiatives (e.g. Sustainable Development Commission, Climate Challenge Fund and Greener Living Fund) have had activities and projects aimed at changing behaviours at the level of the individual, household and community. These include adults, carers, deaf, partially-sighted and blind people and school children. With the exception of the many projects throughout the UK related to energy efficiency, particularly alleviation of fuel poverty, none is targeted at older people.



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A limited number of projects engage older people on environmental issues. These include the following.

Climate change and the over 50s

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP) *Climate Change and the Over 50s* project based in Swindon, focuses on the expressed concern that access to information and advice relevant to them is limited and/or passes them by. Its objective is to directly engage local over 50s community organisations such as lunch clubs and faith groups and provide a follow-up resource should individuals or groups wish to take action. The potential for action is divided into a number of topic

areas (energy; ethical investment; food and drink; travel/transport; waste; water resources). Experiences from this recent work reveal some interesting insights into both the methodology of engagement and the attitudes of this age sector. Use of peer to peer interaction between well-informed messengers and the audience is proving very effective. Discussion and debate highlights the scepticism about both the value of current mass communication campaigns (e.g. Act on CO₂) and perceived inconsistencies between the Government promoting the need to follow greener lifestyles and not leading by example (Brown *et al.*, 2010). The direct interaction is supported by the RSVP West website resource¹ which includes a regularly updated directory of where to access independent, reliable and current information and advice. It has also prompted the initiation of a parallel RSVP activity in Wales.

Sustainable living and older people

The *Sustainable Living and the Older Community* project undertaken by Kingston University (2010) aimed to stimulate interest in and raise awareness of climate change, sustainable development, and living practices in the older age group (65+) in the south east of England. The study used a two way dialogue with older people to find out what mattered to the community, and provided relevant information on a group and individual basis. This approach worked successfully, using agencies trusted by participants (Age Concern, Heyday, Energy Saving Trust and Friends of the Elderly) to support behavioural change. Direct contact was made with more than 1,500 older people about how they could improve their sustainable living practices, while others were reached through press articles and a website.

Particular areas of interest to participants were replacing boilers and heating systems, energy efficient light bulbs, availability of funding and recycling. Feedback was gathered from people who attended the sessions through a short telephone questionnaire. A total of 76 per cent of respondents said they had thought about the issues raised during the event in the time that had passed. When it came to action, 61 per cent had changed something in their lives to become more sustainable, and 38 per cent already had an idea of something else they would be changing in the future. Over half of the respondents (60 per cent) had been talking about the issues with friends and family

1 See: www.rsvp-west.org.uk/climatechange



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and making suggestions as to useful actions that could be taken. Some session attendees had even gone on to form green-living clubs after attending the events.²

Evergreen initiative

The charity Global Action Plan runs a scheme called *EverGreen*, designed to enable specific community groups to make a positive contribution to the future of the environment. The first EverGreen project, launched in 2006, was a partnership between Global Action Plan and Hanover Housing Association, in the London Borough of Hackney. Hanover manages 29 retirement and extra care supported living schemes across Hackney for 850 tenants of pensionable age. Residents and staff formed EverGreen EcoTeams, in which they could discuss environmental issues and opportunities to take action. The groups that were set up in Hanover were mostly made up of pensioners and popular activities focussed around recycling, growing food and intergenerational activities.

This resulted in a wide range of locally relevant environmental activities being agreed and taken on by residents. For example, concerned about food miles and wasteful packaging, residents discussed how they used to grow their own vegetables. Many felt they were no longer able to do this as it meant bending down to tend plants. Global Action Plan created raised beds in 15

sheltered schemes and an active community of resident gardeners emerged. There was also an intergenerational exchange between the EverGreen EcoTeams and a local secondary school. A total of 340 Hanover residents have taken environmental action as a direct result of the project. In the first year 28 tonnes of household waste was recycled and diverted from landfill, saving 34 tonnes of CO₂. The programme claims to have brought noticeable improvements to the residents' quality of life, including physical and emotional health and social interaction.³

Digital storytelling and the over 50s

The University of Bath is currently testing the impact of “digital storytelling” by the over-50s as a tool to promote sustainable behaviour in southwest England. The DEFRA-funded project involves making films about the experiences and practices of the over-50s and showing these to others (of all ages) with the aim of inspiring behaviour change.⁴

Despite these current initiatives, there remains a need to better engage older people on climate change issues.

² See: www.sustainablelivingandtheoldercommunity.co.uk

³ See www.globalactionplan.org.uk/evergreen-action-hanover-housing-association

⁴ See: http://www.storyworksglam.co.uk/pdf/Target_80_Invite.pdf

6 THE CASE FOR BETTER ENGAGEMENT OF OLDER PEOPLE

Recent evidence highlights the following rationale for targeting the over 50s:

Vulnerability of older people: Older people may be physically, financially and emotionally less resilient in coping with the effects of a changing climate than the rest of the population. They are more at risk from climate-related threats due to an increased likelihood of deteriorating health that comes with age. Factors such as income, education, social support network and access to social services will determine how well an individual will cope with a climate-related threat (Haq *et al.*, 2008).

Carbon footprint: An assessment of age-related carbon footprint suggests that the baby-boomer generation, those who constitute the age group of 50-64 years old, have a high carbon footprint compared to other age groups (Haq *et al.*, 2007; 2009). Baby boomers bring higher levels of consumption to middle and later life. They are re-inventing old age basing it on new consumption and leisure-orientated lifestyles, where travel and cosmopolitanism are key features (Leach *et al.*, 2007). In contrast, those aged 75 plus are coping with increasing care needs and declining health. Energy use in the home constitutes a large part of their carbon footprint – 40 per cent higher than the UK average.

They want to do their bit: In 2008 27 per cent of over 65s participated in voluntary and community activities (Audit Commission, 2008). As witnessed through surveys (Haq *et al.*, 2007), group discussions (Brown *et al.*, 2010) and recommendations within the Older people’s manifesto (Green Alliance, 2009) the older generation want to participate in efforts to reduce their environmental impact. However, personal contact particularly highlights the lack of awareness of information sources and the difficulty in accessing the appropriate information on actions that are best suited to their personal, social or economic circumstances. Information available is often perceived as being confusing and contradictory. Removal of these barriers, real or perceived, is key to both better engagement of this age sector and achieving sustained involvement.

Social justice: As well as the social justice issue relating to the vulnerability of older people, it

needs to be acknowledged that it is important to address and overcome the stereotype of this age sector being incapable of engagement, passive, or disinterested. The belief that they are the “missing voice” in the environmental debate was highlighted by Greener and Wiser Taskforce (Green Alliance, 2009). Similarly the life experience and knowledge of the over 50s mean that they are uniquely placed to comment on government responses to political and economic crises.

The need for different approaches to participation and engagement: The assumptions and mechanisms used to raise awareness and direct people to advice and information, particularly advocating use of the internet, may not be appropriate for the over 50s. Whilst 25 per cent of internet users are over 50, an estimated 70 per cent of over 65s have never been online. It is also important that interactions are non-threatening and do not arouse fear and guilt. One example is the need for sensitivity with regard to transport options. Many older age people are more car-dependent than other age sectors. Similarly, there is anecdotal evidence that suggests that the largest growth in the numbers of people flying is in the over 65s. While it is important to draw attention to the carbon impact of these behaviours, it is equally important not to cause individuals to “switch off” and to offer alternative strategies that are better suited to their personal circumstances.

Collectively these reasons provide the justification for taking different approaches to changing the attitudes and behaviour of individuals within older age groups. While it can be helpful to segment populations into broad descriptors of their attitudes, such categorisations do not necessarily reflect how individuals are thinking or how they act. They can certainly help identify effective strategies for engagement but recent studies in Swindon, mentioned above, have highlighted the value of more direct interaction with individuals and groups. This direct interaction could be even more powerful if undertaken within the umbrella of trusted sources of information, such as well-known charities, e.g. Age UK (formerly Help the Aged/ Age Concern) who have established networks and mechanisms to communicate messages (Moser, 2009).

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving and maintaining public engagement and action on climate change is a major challenge. Given the growth in public scepticism, it is therefore timely to evaluate existing public engagement approaches to ensure they are as well-targeted, effective and equitable as possible. This is particularly important when engaging older people, where it has been shown that top down approaches can lack credibility unless formulated by their peers (Reed *et al.*, 2008). Conversely, while grass roots approaches tend to have greater credibility with older people, they are not always favoured by institutions and agencies, despite being very effective at the local level. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has established an Older People's Research Advisory Group as a mechanism for involving older people in commissioning and conducting research rather than simply using them as a source of data (Reed *et al.*, 2008).

Examining the potential for targeting older people could prove valuable at a number of levels. As well as increasing the probability of changing individual behaviours, it responds to the perceived lack of involvement and engagement of older people. It can also provide a basis for better understandings of attitudes to climate change and the underlying suite of associated environmental issues. Recent studies (Brown *et al.*, 2010) undertaken on direct interaction



Guitarist Jan Akkerman © Gus Hertzog

with the older age sector on climate change have demonstrated that, used in the appropriate way, it is a headline topic that can be used to stimulate lively discussion and debate on many issues related to environment and sustainability.

In tandem with this approach, the recommendations suggested below will improve and enhance engagement of older people on issues related to climate change and greener living.

1 Abandon old stereotypes

Forget negative stereotypes that view older people as being incapable, passive or disinterested. People are living longer due to better health care. This means they are remaining active in later life. Chronological age is no longer an indicator of how an individual will behave or cope.

2 Get to know your target audience

Socio-demographic datasets can obscure differences between different groups of older people. Get to know your target audience and develop and refine your understanding of differences that exist within the age group. Rather than just using attitude surveys, take into account people's underlying values and their actual behaviour.

3 Use trusted brands

Information sources, messengers and "brands" that older people trust such as charities and established local community groups should be used when engaging with older people on climate change and green issues.

4 Use peer to peer communication

Older people are more likely to engage with ideas if they are presented by people they know and trust. As in the EverGreen and RSVP Swindon projects, existing social networks can be valuable in disseminating ideas, allowing people to share tips and even compare their progress with that of others.

5 Use positive messages

Positive messages to inspire action should be used, rather than messages of guilt and fear that risk promoting inaction. These should suggest specific, accessible forms of action that older people can adopt.

6 Use the right "frames"

Once you have a good understanding of the values and priorities of your target audience, you can "frame" the information to be interesting and meaningful

to them. For older people, this could mean using language and images that draw on values such as thrift, intergenerational justice and doing their bit for the community.

7 Show real life examples

Good examples are important, as they reassure people that they are not alone in taking action, as well as providing ideas and inspiration. One way to do this is through the institutions and buildings older people come into contact with, such as community centres, churches, shops, hospitals and residential homes. Another is the possibility that adopting environmentally friendly practices might also be financially beneficial.

8 Develop an inclusive dialogue

Engage people in a dialogue about what works and show that their experience is recognised and valued. Sometimes consultation processes rely on representatives of service providers ('gatekeepers') to speak on behalf of older people. While they may have valuable insights, they do not directly represent older people's perspectives and their voices should not be the only ones to be heard.

9 Maximise participation

To maximise input and involvement, promote discussion and debate rather than lecturing and, where possible, provide adequate financial reimbursements for transport or expenses to support people with a disability that may limit their participation. Timing, formats and safety of consultations are also important considerations

10 Ensure the setting is right for change

Finally, engagement of older people must be seen as part of a whole-system change, which includes regulatory, financial and infrastructural policies that promote the transition to a low carbon economy. As part of this, facilities must be provided to enable greener lifestyles, taking into account the different needs and capabilities of older people. Changes should include: improving rural bus services and offering demand responsive options; reversing the closure of post offices to provide older people with the opportunity to use local services rather than rely on longer distance trips which will skew choices towards the car; and providing targeted grants to older people for installing renewable energy systems such as photovoltaics or ground source heat pumps.



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