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Cornwall's Climate Stories

Communicating climate change reality and optimism – a difficult but essential balancing act

Cornwall Council is ahead of the field. It's one of the UK's most ambitious local authorities in terms of action on climate change, aiming to get to carbon neutral by 2030 – 20 years ahead of the UK government's own target.

But... is there a bit of a disconnect between the Council's stated aims and wider public perceptions about the urgency of the climate emergency?

One thing laid bare by the country's quick reaction to the clinical advice on Covid-19 has been the huge contrast with the general political and public response to increasingly urgent scientific appeals about climate change... which will certainly have much more far-reaching impacts than coronavirus.

Like heavy smokers unwilling to kick a habit that may very well kill them – but not for another couple of decades – we don't seem very good at dealing with the vagueness of future threats, even when we're told they will seriously affect our own children's lives and more than likely our own too.

Now, as the economic fallout from the pandemic leaves many people in Cornwall, already one of the most deprived counties in the UK, facing an even greater struggle to get from one day to the next, will the public become still more disengaged from the relatively 'distant' issue of climate change?

This is where we hope Cornwall Climate Care (www.cornwallclimate.org) can make a big difference.

Over the next couple of years, *Cornwall's Climate Stories* will document many issues around climate change in Cornwall.... and try to get everybody on the same page with understanding the urgent need to tackle it.

We will interview scientists who will reveal the insidious impacts already gathering pace here – not just the visible and obvious ones like increasing storms and floods and rising sea levels.

Few people realise, for example, that around the Cornish coast communities of microscopic plankton, the base of the whole marine food web, have been silently shifting hundreds of kilometres northwards as our seas warm. Our fishermen, working on the frontline, are already seeing big changes in what's coming up in their nets – but there are other effects too, such as a potential rise in marine pathogens that cause diseases such as cholera.

A lot of the changes happening can make the future look pretty scary. But it's also undeniable that the 'doom and gloom' narrative of activists like Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion can make people give up hope and turn off.

So what can we do?

Cornwall's Climate Stories will not underplay the seriousness of the problem – but we know the massive task of getting to carbon neutrality is going to require massive public engagement.

So we will focus on other, often untold, parts of the climate story too. We want to celebrate the huge number of inspirational and pioneering things happening in Cornwall, documenting how communities, the council, businesses and individuals are rising to the challenges that climate change will inevitably bring, and hopefully motivating others to get involved.

The films will be broken down in themes, with each one focusing on a different aspect of our lives, from housing, transport and fishing to energy, health and farming, and looking at how these could be radically transformed in the future, sometimes with potentially exciting opportunities to be harnessed.

They will showcase the ground breaking work being done by local researchers to help us adapt, and some possible visions of a very different future - where we could use beavers to re-engineer Cornish rivers and prevent floods, offshore wave power to produce clean hydrogen fuel, and diversify our dairy-heavy farming industry to grow new crops like sunflowers or sweet potatoes.

We aim to screen the films at schools, colleges and community events the length and breadth of the county, as well as online, to show how Cornwall's

natural resources and ingenuity could make us a great example for the rest of the UK to follow on the critical journey to a low carbon future.

Right now, however, we are at a crossroads. If the pandemic has revealed one thing it is how hard the task is going to be.

The world's emissions this year, even after the huge shutdown in travel and industry, will drop by about 4%. Yet to give us a chance of keeping temperature rises within 'safe' limits we in Cornwall will need to reduce our emissions by at least 10% ... not just once, but every year for the foreseeable future!

The huge Covid recovery investments to be made in Cornwall, the UK and worldwide in the next few months are crucial, as they will dictate whether we succeed or fail in the battle to avert the worst impacts of climate change.

Against the backdrop of understandable pressure to quickly get people's lives back on track the stakes could not be higher.

- We're looking for inspirational stories from all over Cornwall! If you know of a community group, business or individual doing something amazing that we should be documenting, please let us know on info@cornwallclimate.org
- Keep up to date with our project and the stories we've been filming so far by following our page Cornwall Climate Care on Facebook or Instagram.



www.cornwallclimate.org