



**A practical guide to seeking
climate justice where you are**
from the Joint Public Issues Team

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Net Zero In My Neighbourhood

This resource is a practical guide to help you to engage with your councils on their plans to reach net zero, by building local relationships. We'll look in depth at how to form coalitions for climate justice where you are, the dos and don'ts of contacting councillors, and why positive relationships of trust can help to bring about effective change.

Want to read up more about the campaign?

[Click here to check out why building net zero in your neighbourhood is so important.](#)

[Click here to find out about the role churches have to play.](#)

[Click here to find out more about the power councils have.](#)

Sign up to our online community of people building local relationships for climate action.

Visit jpit.uk/net-zero-in-my-neighbourhood.

Or scan here.



Net Zero In My Neighbourhood

If you want to be a champion for net zero in *your* neighbourhood, where should you start?

Relationships

As best as you can, do it in relationship. We speak more loudly when we speak together. Regardless of whether our advocacy is successful or not, the connections we make along the way are invaluable in building coalitions of community champions. It can be tempting to go it alone and have full control over the process, but as the old proverb says:

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

Step one: getting your church on board

Start by getting your church on board. Speaking up as churches and other institutions will give your asks requests an extra layer of legitimacy and credibility. You can still take action as an individual or with a few trusted friends – but being able to represent a wider community group might help you get started quicker.

This might be challenging for some, particularly if you've been ploughing a lone furrow for creation care in your congregation for some time. We'd love to support you in attempting to change that, so please do get in touch with us at [jpit.uk!](https://jpit.uk)

In addition, taking some action to reduce your church's carbon footprint can lend further credibility to your cause – [EcoChurch](#)¹ (England and Wales) and [EcoCongregation](#)² (Scotland) are excellent schemes to equip your church for climate action, that are already being used by hundreds of churches. Furthermore, each denomination has further guidance and

resources³ to support churches looking to adapt their buildings, reform their practices, and incorporate care for creation into prayer and worship.

Many churches built strong relationships with their councils over the COVID lockdowns, when they were able to support isolated members of the community together. While those relationships should not become transactional, they certainly help a church to have a credible local voice when asking for this kind of change.

For those who do not yet have this kind of relationship, they may find their local authorities more open to approach than they had been previously. In fact, this can be particularly effective if your church doesn't usually speak up on local social issues. One thing elected representatives always notice is when new people start talking to them about an issue, so don't be dissuaded from getting involved if that's the case!

[Click here to read more about the key role churches play in achieving net zero locally.](#)



Step two: identify others in your area

Next, identify others in your area who might be willing to join their voice to yours. You could start with your local ecumenical or interfaith groups, tap into other relationships and networks you are already part of, and search for others who are already working on this in your area. [Friends of the Earth](#)⁴ have more than 350 groups around the country who will already have organised local action, and you may decide to join in with a group like this.

You could also reach out to local businesses, schools, and other institutions in your community. Remember that the breadth of your coalition will be a great strength. It may make agreeing on action points trickier, but if you all have an interest in securing an environmentally-friendly neighbourhood, it shouldn't take long to find some asks you can all sign up to.

Step three: arrange an open meeting

Invite the community in for a meeting. This is so you can establish a group who are willing and able to take the action forwards, and set out what steps you need to take together before meeting with your council. You might call it 'Net Zero in [insert borough name]', and invite people to 'come together as a community to work with [your council] in addressing climate change'.

Send formal invitations to those partners you have identified, but make it open and send it round community forums if you're feeling brave! It is important still to invite specific groups in an effort to include those who may not typically put themselves forward for such action. You could hold the meeting online to widen participation, or it could be a great way to open up your church building to welcome in your community.

Try not to be too prescriptive in your initial meeting – remember, we're still in the phase of building relationships. Change moves at the pace of trust. People will trust you more if they feel heard and listened to, rather than simply that they've been invited to hear someone else's agenda.

Make space to listen to one another. Ask everyone why they came and how they feel about the area and its approach to climate change. You may want to present some of the context of your council, using the great resources highlighted on the next page. Find out what each person is passionate about and identify common ground, as that's where you can build power together and find a way forward. While you should try to keep the meeting free from power imbalance, it may be wise to have an appointed chair with expressed permission to intervene and steer the conversation in a productive direction.

Once you have identified what people care about and who has the time and capacity to get involved, you'll want to prepare for meeting your councillors.



Research

You don't need to be an expert on climate policy or on lobbying – in fact, your councillors likely aren't experts either! They tend to be hard-working local people, who often have jobs alongside being a councillor, and may not be an expert in any specific topic. Local councillors are not the same as MPs: they generally don't get paid lots to be a councillor and may have been elected because of a particular local issue, rather than always because of their political party (if they are part of one). They have, on average, two days a week to give to council business.

However, it's important to be able to identify one, or a handful, of specific things you are going to ask your council. This could be as general as asking them to bring their net-zero date sooner, or about improving communication and the availability of information, or about something particular like walking and cycling infrastructure. Get to know what's been happening in your area to give you a head start.

There is a wealth of information out there to help you research your council and their climate plans. Here are our top two:

Friends of the Earth's Near You tool⁵ gives the lowdown on what's happening in your area, suggests the ways your council could improve, and even points you towards [case studies](#)⁶ of how other councils are addressing that issue well. It's a great source of relevant data that you can use to support your case when you speak to your councillors. They also have a [template climate action plan](#),⁷ from which you might want to suggest some things for your council to adopt.

[Climate Emergency UK's Council Climate Scorecards](#).⁸ Climate Emergency UK have collected and rated the published climate action plans of every local authority in the

country. They have assessed these plans against a range of specific criteria to help you identify where your council can improve, and in future years they will rate them on the delivery of those plans. You can look up your council, see how they compare nationally, and filter them with other councils in the same region, with similar levels of urbanisation or deprivation, population, or political control. From here, they've collected links to the relevant documents that make up your council's plans, but it's worth checking your council website and social media to see if they've said anything else recently. CEUK have also published this [guide to using the scorecards](#)⁹ and a [guide to campaigning from the scorecards](#)¹⁰ if you're finding it tough!



Top tips for talking to your councillor

The thing that turns councillors off the most is when people ask them for things that they cannot achieve. Make sure you know what is actually in their gift to decide, but don't be afraid to ask them to explain if you don't know. Some key points to remember:

- Local authority budgets have been squeezed over the last decade,¹¹ and demands on statutory services such as social care and children's services are increasing. While they may be willing in theory to support your climate ideas, they may not have the resources to do so. Try to ask for things that are financially viable, either by demonstrating that they are affordable up front, value for money in the long run, or by suggesting creative ways to raise funds to support such action.¹²
- Councils are the enforcers of planning regulations, but those regulations are set centrally. While councils do have the freedom to go beyond these minimum standards,¹³ it is very difficult to do so in a competitive market where contractors are incentivised to reduce costs by building in areas with lower regulation. You can suggest that your council sets a higher standard as a leader in your area, but acknowledge that national planning laws should go further.
- Councils make local transport plans and can make decisions about roads, neighbourhoods, walking & cycling etc., but large infrastructure projects need the cooperation of national/regional government and public transport providers. Think about what changes your council can make themselves, or how they can work together with other bodies to improve local transport.
- Make sure you know what the specific person you are talking to is able to achieve. If they do not work at the right level to achieve what you are asking, then think about how they can influence and work with those who are.

There's plenty of information to help you figure out what to ask of your council, but you only need to identify 1-3 important and specific things. See the flow chart on p.9 for some guidance on how you might choose this – but don't feel constrained to follow this process.

Keep your asks SMART

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-bound



Reach out

Find out if you have a local councillor with a remit for the environment. If your council has a cabinet system with different roles, this should be listed on their website. If you can't find this information, perhaps reach out instead to the councillors in the ward that you or your church are in – the personal connection really helps.

As with identifying your coalition partners, find a way to connect with your councillor as a human being. Remember that they are someone else who cares deeply enough about the wellbeing of your community that they too give up time to serve it. This can help the relationship to be a productive one. A great way to do this might be to invite the councillor/s to a church service - get them to see what you're about, meet your community, and build that human relationship first before you ask them to do things for you.

Most of the communication councillors have with residents is negative, particularly on climate issues, so identify some ways to positively engage first. There might be some things they are doing well on climate, or other issues, that you can acknowledge. It can help to do some research on the councillor themselves - how long have they been a councillor? What political party are they part of? What issues do they care about – do they post a lot on Twitter, or have they written in the local paper? What have they said/done before on climate change? You can use all this knowledge to help decide your angles.

When you have met with them, offer them the chance to meet with the community at an open meeting. The key strength of local councillors is in being local leaders, so they should be keen to meet with the kind of group you have organised. They are mandated to respond to residents, and doing so can improve their community engagement score!

When you've had that conversation, arrange the next one. Productive change will be brought about by a long-term, ongoing relationship, so be sure to keep channels of conversation open. Don't let them get away with ticking off a single meeting as having 'met with the community', but push for them to speak to you regularly – perhaps on a quarterly or twice-yearly basis.

Finally, assign one or two people in your group to the task of scrutiny. It is easy to talk a good game, but success depends on the effective delivery of promises. Make sure you follow up and are aware of what the council does as a result of your conversations, so that you can push them to make good on their promises.



Build your support network

If you would like more support in contacting your elected representatives, get in touch with [Hope for the Future](#).¹⁴ They offer training and ongoing support to help make your advocacy as effective as it possibly can be.

Do stay in touch with us at JPIT too - we want to hear about your successes, your struggles, connect you to others, and support you as you take on the challenge. You can scan the QR at the front of this resource or [click here](#) to join our campaign mailing list.¹⁵

Top ten tips for engaging your council

1. Don't assume that the councillor is an expert
2. Do your research
3. Form SMART requests: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound
4. Don't ask for something a councillor cannot do
5. Have a positive, empowering message rather than a negative one
6. Have a two-way conversation and be ready to take new information on board
7. Invite them to meet your community
8. Keep channels of conversation open
9. Scrutinise delivery, hold them to account
10. Stay in touch with JPIT!

Visit jpit.uk/net-zero-in-my-neighbourhood for more resources.



Our step by step guide to getting started

Does your council have a target date for net zero?

No

Yes

Ask them to commit to a date - at least to match the UK government in 2050.

Is it ambitious enough?

No

Yes

Ask them to bring it forward - perhaps by 10 years.

Do they have a published climate action plan, accessible in one place on their website?

Yes

No

Look at the climate scorecards and identify areas where they struggle compared to the national average or 'like' councils. Select one or two policies your coalition feels strongly about, and ask for these. Find examples of councils who are doing these well to support your request.

Ask them to put one together with help from Friends of the Earth's template Climate Action Plan.

Is your council perfect? Ask them to partner and share with neighbouring councils to create joined-up local thinking and expand your net zero neighbourhood!

Notes

¹ <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>

² <http://www.ecocongregation.org/>

³ <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/environment-and-climate-change/> and <https://urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/become-an-eco-church-or-congregation/> and https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/349554/Baptist_Union_Environment.aspx

⁴ <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/take-action/join-group-near-you>

⁵ <https://takeclimateaction.uk/near-you/local-authority>

⁶ <https://takeclimateaction.uk/resources/councils-tackling-climate-chaos>

⁷ <https://takeclimateaction.uk/climate-action/get-your-council-adopt-climate-action-plan>

⁸ <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/>

⁹ <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/how-to-use-the-scorecards/>

¹⁰ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HIXdhyFvku2Mq_TuXrzAHxa4gGV09-7/view

¹¹ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/local-government-funding-england>

¹² For example, Nottingham City Council has implemented a Workplace Parking Levy, where workplaces with 11 or more parking spaces for staff pay a levy that has raised over £80m to fund the tram network, electric bus fleet and improvements to the train station. <https://takeclimateaction.uk/climate-action/how-nottingham-used-parking-levy-cut-congestion-and-raise-millions>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-and-the-path-to-net-zero-government-response-to-the-select-committee-report/local-government-and-the-path-to-net-zero-government-response-to-the-select-committee-report>. Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government response to a Select Committee report, January 2022, under Recommendation 7a.

¹⁴ <http://www.hftf.org.uk>

¹⁵ <https://jpit.uk/net-zero-in-my-neighbourhood>

