



A GUIDE TO ENGAGING YOUR LOCAL COUNCILS DURING GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK

This resource, created by [Hope for the Future](#), will provide information on why it's important to engage with your local councils and authorities on climate change, and how you can do it effectively during Great Big Green Week.

Why are your local authorities important?

Local authorities in the UK play a crucial role in the provision of public services and the governance of local communities. Despite significant funding cuts over the past decade, the powers that local authorities hold in areas such as housing, education, waste and recycling, and management of green spaces make them vitally important in tackling climate change and protecting nature.

Local authorities and local councillors can also be important conduits for raising awareness of climate issues locally. Their responsibility to represent our voices on the most local level is thus a key opportunity to raise awareness and make tangible changes in your community.

The wide range of local authorities that will cover an area, for example larger combined authorities, down to smaller district councils and town and parish councils, also means that there are multiple different points that you can engage in local democracy.

The powers that your local authorities, and by extension your local councillors, will have will therefore vary greatly. For example, if you live within a combined authority area with an elected Mayor, they might have additional resources and powers over areas such as transport devolved to them from the central government. If you live within a two-tiered area then your district council will have powers over waste collection, housing, and local planning whereas your county council's responsibilities will include education and transport. Local authorities and local councillors are also more accessible than parliamentary politics which provides a further, and powerful, engagement opportunity for local people who want to have their voices heard in local government.

'Members of the public turning up and asking questions at council meetings, that really makes members sit up and pay attention. Because there's too many committee meetings that happen, and although the public know, you can safely assume that there isn't actually anybody listening in' Great Party County Councillor





How to find your councillor

It is vitally important to do your research on what the local authority and local councillor that you wish to engage has the power to do.

You can find your councillors' details on your local council website. Unlike MPs, where you have one representative for your local area, there are various councillors you might want to engage. Approaching those that directly represent your ward may be your best first step, as they'll be keen to secure the votes of you and your neighbours. However, you might also want to contact councillors who have specific interests that align with the topic you want to engage on, such as transport or housing. For your initial engagement and your local events during Great Big Green Week, you may also want to find a councillor who is already pro-climate action, as they can both provide a positive initial point of contact and source of information, and they will likely be very happy to have your support!

Who you choose to engage is completely up to you and your capacity.

'Now what we need is action. And action doesn't come from demands, action comes from people coming together in small groups, or with ideas and saying, Can we do this? How do we do this? Can you help us do this? And as councillors, it's great if we get that kind of thing coming forward' Conservative County Council Leader

How to engage your local councillors

MPs and local councillors

Councillors, like anyone, respond best when they feel seen and understood as a person, rather than just a position. Much of the correspondence they get is often stock campaign emails or emotional communications from local people demanding action on issues.

Through interviewing councillors all over the UK, we know that politicians and candidates tend to respond more positively to correspondence which is personal and local. That's why tailoring your letter is important.

Doing some research into the councillor(s) you want to contact is the first step to achieving a personalised letter and a positive engagement. This doesn't have to be exhaustive, you just need to know a bit more about who they are as a person, what might they be interested in, where might you have common interests with them? This could be done through looking at their social media accounts, any news articles they have written or appear in, or even just through word of mouth by asking around in your community!

Picking a subject





Below is a helpful diagram to use when thinking about the topic area of choice to discuss with your councillors. Focusing on the area in the middle of the Venn Diagram can help you decide which topic area is most suitable for your letter. Some will be motivated by leading the way with technological and scientific expertise required by the climate crisis. Others may be motivated by the concept of working towards a 'just transition', green jobs and pursuing policies of 'climate justice'. Councillors will also have an interest in important issues that already exist in your local community.

Your area of common ground doesn't have to be a whole policy area. It could be something small, such as attending the same event. This is a good way to start building rapport with councillors who are especially less willing to discuss climate change specifically.

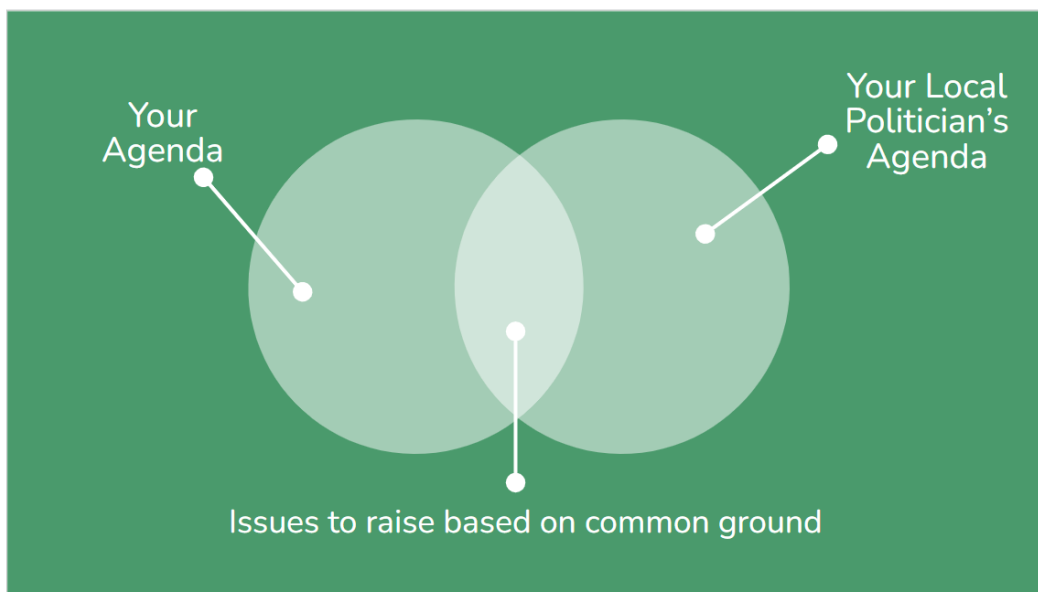


Figure 1: Diagram visually showing how to find a topic area based on common ground.

Writing to request a meeting

To build a genuine and effective relationship between yourself and your councillors, writing to them and requesting a meeting is the best way to start this.

When writing to your chosen councillor, follow these simple steps:

Step 1: Introduction

- a) Introduce yourself - Include relevant details about yourself such as where you live, any previous engagements you have had with the councillor and/or council, and if you're representing a local group
- b) Introduce your topic - Briefly outline what your topic is. This part only needs to be one sentence, such as: "The key issue for me is local transport links. I am contacting you regarding your plans to improve low carbon and active travel in our local area"

Step 2: Acknowledgment





Councillors, like all of us, like to feel heard and appreciated. This, in turn, will make them more receptive to your letter. Therefore, acknowledging positive actions, statements, and/or commitments that the councillor has made can be a useful way to build a positive relationship between you both in an area where you share common ground.

This information can be hard to find, so don't worry if you can't find personal information for this stage.

Step 3: Topics of discussion

This section will look different in every letter, but usually consists of two or three short paragraphs. Any topic you may choose to write about is unique, so it is important that this section is personal and tailored based on your topic, councillor, and local area.

- a) Provide the context of the issue(s) you would like to discuss
 - i) What the issue is, the background of the issues, any data and information locally that demonstrates this importance.
 - ii) How it relates to the councillor, their position and their local area
- b) Why this issue is important to you and the local area

Step 4: Request a meeting or action

After you have introduced yourself, your topic and how it is relevant for the councillor you're contacting, you have two main options. Firstly, you can now ask the councillor to take a specific action. Secondly, you could request a meeting with the councillor to discuss your topic in person. In person meetings are a good way to build personal relationships and make an impression.

How to get your councils involved in Great Big Green Week

Since 2021, we have seen councils across the country organise their own Green Weeks, collaborating with communities to host events that engage local residents. Here, you will find two examples of different local councils that have got involved in Great Big Green Week, and how you can engage your council to also get involved.

Swale Borough Council, 2021 and 2022

Through collaboration with local groups, Swale Borough Council hosted a local Green Week with 30 events in 2021. The local Green Week involved 17 organisations, and events ranged from craft sessions, talks, litter picks, pollinator planting to their very own Swale Borough Council climate roadshow. The council also gave away 200 pollinator friendly plants.

The Climate Coalition provided the council with a grant which the council then distributed. Swale Borough Council worked with event organisers, promoted and covered the events via social media and provided support to event organisers conducting risk assessments and other event administration.





The overarching theme was that each event shared information about the climate and ecological emergency through resources such as training, leaflets and signposting. The council's own coordinated events inspired other organisations to host a GBGW event, expanding the calendar of events.

Swale Borough Council also hosted a local Green Week in 2022.

Runnymede Council, 2022 and 2023

In 2022, Runnymede Council also hosted a local Green Week. During the week, 6 events were organised including an eco-fayre, local clean ups and litter picks, and a session for people to learn about their carbon footprint.

Runnymede Council is organising another local Green Week in 2023. They are organising their own events and also encouraging other individuals, groups and organisations in the community to host their own.

They have a [dedicated page](#) on their website about Great Big Green Week, with information on the week, how people can get involved, and links to helpful resources for organisers and individuals to take part.

So what can you do? Great Big Green Week is an important opportunity for you to engage with your councillors and local authorities on climate and nature issues, and there are a number of ways they can get involved.

Ask your council to host their own events or Green Week

Reach out to your local council to see if they are planning anything for Great Big Green Week this year. If they are, that's great! If they're not, you could ask them if they would be interested in hosting events this year or in future Great Big Green Weeks. There is lots of information on the website and provided in resources to share with your local council, but if they have questions or need more information, they can email contact@greatbiggreenweek.com.

Ask your council to support Great Big Green Week

If they can't host their own events, perhaps they could support local residents and organisations to host their own. Reach out to your council to see if they could provide any funding for your events, or even provide things like venues or resources to alleviate some costs.

Your council could also act as a hub for your Green Week events. This means they could help with the central coordination, for example, by producing an events timetable, hosting an events calendar on the council website, and helping with promotion. They could also reach out to partners and local organisations to get involved too.





Lastly, there are other ways your local council can support Great Big Green Week activity without hosting or facilitating events. They could:

- Host a Great Big Green Week page on the council website, sharing information and resources for people to use
- Support on social media by sharing any local events taking place or sharing general Great Big Green Week content

Invite your councillors to attend local events

MPs and councillors need to know that there is support in their area for ambitious action on climate, so use your event(s) to show them that your community wants to see more from them. Invite them to attend the event, or even be a part of it. Great Big Green Week is an opportunity to demonstrate the scale of support for climate action across the country - if everyone invited their MP and councillors to their events, it would be a message that's impossible to ignore.

This is especially true for newly elected councillors. We have found that it can take a long time before councillors feel fully confident in their roles, which makes engaging and supporting newly elected councillors a key opportunity. You and your events can provide them with the knowledge of actions they can do alongside the support and empowerment that they need to confidently take these actions.

Newly elected councillors will also be keen to get to know their community in their new roles and be seen to be responsive to and active within their local community. They will likely be keen, therefore, to attend local events with Great Big Green Week.

Arrange to meet with your councillor during Great Big Green Week

You don't have to have organised an event for Great Big Green Week to engage with your councillors during the week. Ask to set up a meeting with them to talk about Great Big Green Week where people from across the country are coming together to take action on climate and nature issues, why you care about these issues and why you want to see action from them.

You can use the guidance provided in this resource to help you choose a topic to discuss, how to structure the conversation and how to invite them to meet with you.

You can also visit www.greatbiggreenweek.com/get-involved/politicians for more information on what we're calling on the Government to do to tackle the climate and nature crises, and more support for engaging your local politicians on these issues during Great Big Green Week.

