

# Cynon Climate Assembly



**Beth Winter MP**

**WORKING TOGETHER IN CYNON  
FOR A FAIRER FUTURE FOR ALL**

# INTRODUCTION - BETH WINTER MP



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**We demand an urgent move from talk to action.**

## **Climate change is the biggest issue we face.**

Dr Shah Imtiaz sent me a Christmas card once which said “We do not inherit the world. We borrow it from our children”. We have now reached an existential crisis point and we need to act **now** to begin to turn the tide if we are serious about passing a habitable planet on to our children.

It is past time we move from talk to action. COP 26 must achieve a clear co-ordinated response to that demand. It is my sincere hope that countries will be able to work in cooperation to save our planet and I wish all those participating in COP 26 every success.

Cynon Valley lies in the heart of the old mining communities of the South Wales Valleys. It suffers from higher than average levels of poverty and ill-health. This is the legacy of a rapid and unjust transition away from the mining industries upon which our economy was built. Cynon Valley people know all too well the need to ensure that history does not repeat itself and that future-proofing our planet does not leave communities like ours behind. The people of the Cynon Valley are ready for change, but need to have their voices heard so that they are not further disadvantaged by the radical changes ahead.

That is why I organised three climate assemblies in Cynon Valley, inviting a range of organisations as well as members of the public, to talk about the change we want to see. These talks covered:

- 1. Green Jobs**
- 2. Green Transport**
- 3. Green Energy**

Meetings were well attended (by zoom), with over 120 participants, representing industry, local authority, the Senedd, academics, trade unionists and voluntary and community organisations as well as interested members of the public. Ages ranged from 15 to 85. While these are the views of those who attended these assemblies, they represent a wide range of experience and knowledge.

I am so grateful to all the people of Cynon Valley who took part and spoke honestly and openly about their fears and hopes for the future and about how they feel things can change and what are their priorities for action.

**THE FOLLOWING IS THE VOICE OF CYNON VALLEY PEOPLE who joined in these climate assemblies. This is our message to COP 26.**

*B Winter*

# THE EXPERTS

Ahead of each discussion, we had outstanding guest speakers who informed and set the tone for the discussions that followed. Below is my summary of what I felt were some of the key points in the speakers' contributions. Huge thanks to all our guest speakers.

## GREEN JOBS



**Lee Waters MS** talked about the need to transition from a Carbon reliant economy to a zero-carbon economy. He spoke about the work of Welsh Government and future plans but recognised that more work is needed. We need to stop money leaking out of the Welsh economy. Climate Crisis is now, we are already seeing it, like increasingly regular flooding. **Professor Calvin Jones** said that we will be in competition with every community in the world for the green jobs of the future. Why should green employers choose to come to the Cynon Valley? We need an attractive infrastructure, like active and public travel networks, co-working spaces, digital infrastructure and a green skills base. "What kind of community must we become in order to survive and thrive in a responsible way in the context of climate crisis?". **Jo Rees** from the Wales TUC spoke about the potential for jobs in retrofitting, transport and manufacturing. TUC estimate that a £6bn investment would return 60,000 new jobs in Wales. Speaks about the huge gap between rhetoric and funding from UK Government. UK spending works out £180 per person. In the US, the equivalent is £3000 per person. She also highlighted the need to ensure quality jobs. Better jobs closer to home.

## GREEN TRANSPORT



Future Generations Commissioner for Wales **Sophie Howe** began the session by speaking about the scale and immediacy of the Climate Crisis. Hardly any countries are on track for their targets and so we are heading for way over 2 degrees warming. Transport emissions are 14% of our emissions in Wales and that number is not yet coming down. More road building equals less investment in public transport. We need to reverse that. We need modal shift in the way we think about transport. The decisions we make now should not adversely affect future generations. **Gemma Lelliott** from the Community Transport Association spoke about the need to radically reduce our carbon emissions in the next decade. We need an integrated and sustainable public transport system. Public transport in Wales is often disconnected, expensive and inaccessible. At the same time, commercial operators are closing because they are not viable. Speaks about accessible caring transport in Cynon Valley. RCT Climate champion **Cllr Rhys Lewis** says 'we can transform transport around the valleys'. We need the biggest transformation since the Victorian era. Speaks about South Wales metro and about the council's plans for electric vehicle charging points. Speaks about active travel plans and the subsidies the Council provide private bus companies.

## GREEN ENERGY



**Berry Jordan** from Vattenfall (Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm) spoke about how renewable energy can work for communities and about the potential we have in Wales. She spoke about the workforce at Vattenfall with people able to retrain quickly from other professions, mechanics, electricians etc. We need to ensure adequate funding and inter-governmental work. **Helen Taylor** from Ecotricity spoke about the huge contribution of energy to our carbon footprint and the importance of taking the time to understand your own carbon footprint. 'First energy, then transport, then food'. There are lots of simple things we can do to make a difference, but changes need to be affordable. We can't think 'somebody else is going to do it'. We need to be the change ourselves. Need to set targets and work together to reach them.

# GREEN JOBS



**We need a green skills construction college, churning out skilled workers for the jobs of the future**

Following the introductions from Lee Waters MS, Professor Calvin Jones and Jo Rees from Wales TUC, participants split into groups to discuss the theme of 'Green Jobs' in the Cynon Valley. The main talking points to come out from those discussions are below:

## **Culture and education**

- Education was felt to be important at all ages. Schools play a vital role in "teaching young people about greener ways of living".
- There was concern about resistance to change though it was felt that this may be "part of the general human condition".
- Need for skills training "skills for the future" clearly identified.
- Idea of a college for the South Wales Valleys for "green skills construction" applauded by all participants. Can retrain people e.g. for retrofitting homes, delivering heat pumps to move away from gas fired boilers.
- Nurture local talent – and keep that talent local. No more "brain drain".

## **A fair and just transition**

- Need to be clear about what is a green job – tourism can mean more carbon emissions as people travel to tourist attractions.
- Quality of jobs important - need to be sure new green jobs are secure, well paid with good terms and conditions.
- All supported slogan "**Better jobs, closer to home**".
- All agreed on need to focus on kind of community we want to live in and what therefore needs to happen, rather than starting from what jobs we want to bring in.

## **Action and Potential**

- Participants were pleased with leadership in Wales, but accepted that more needs to be done.
- Local action on local environment by local people celebrated; Cynon Valley Organic, Cwmbach Wetlands, Welcome to our Woods, to name but a few.
- Foundation economy/social enterprises to be encouraged. Need to be making our own – producing and buying goods made in Wales e.g. build our own electric buses and wind turbines.
- Affordability theme emphasised e.g. cost and availability of public transport to and from work (trains), cost of retrofitting homes, cost of re-training .
- **Cooperation and not competition must be the way forward.**

# GREEN TRANSPORT

Following the introductions from Sophie Howe, Gemma Lelliott and Cllr Rhys Lewis, participants split into groups to discuss the theme of 'Green Transport'. The main talking points to come out from those discussions are below:

## Accessibility and affordability

- Electric cars can be expensive, and public transport needs to be accessible and affordable.
- Needs of people with disabilities to be considered for both access to transport and affordability.
- Needs of outlying, more rural areas of valley communities for public transport not being met currently.
- How to develop "electric vehicle infrastructure" in the valleys. Charging of electric vehicles not straightforward; combination of steep mountains and terraced housing.
- Could we be looking outside our borders for access to affordable electricity and use of other developments e.g. hydrogen.
- Changing people's patterns of behaviour difficult – "people are committed to individual cars", "car is king" so making public transport accessible and affordable is vital first step.

## Ownership

- Deregulation has caused problems and needs to be undone
- Mistakes of past to be rectified – not "top down approach, but community based needs and solutions must be listened to".
- Take public transport into public ownership – "take it in house"
- Top priority for all is public transport developments – to be frequent, timely and available.

## Local needs and solutions

- Town planning locally seen as important factor to be addressed – "out of town retail parks encourage use of cars"
- Develop car-sharing clubs and car free zones, better cycle routes and seek to re-establish community ties.
- Decarbonise transport used by all public bodies e.g. of school transport given.
- Re-open train line from Glyncoch to Pontypridd
- Put charging points in car parks
- No further road building (see Wales moratorium – welcomed by most participants)
- Need dedicated public transport routes for work purposes e.g. Aberdare to Cardiff.
- Need to consider East-West transport routes as well as North South



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**Out of town  
retail parks  
encourage the  
use of cars.**

# GREEN ENERGY

Following the introductions from Berry Jordan and Helen Taylor, participants split into groups to discuss the theme of 'Green Energy'. The main talking points to come out from those discussions are below:

## Potential

- Huge potential in Wales for renewables recognised. We have the natural resources in abundance; coastline, mountains, water, wind, trees.
- A strong feeling that communities in Wales have the natural resources to become self-sufficient in energy production.
- People willing to change but need more information. The example is given of home insulation and how that can both "save money and make a positive difference". "Loft insulation of local community hall reduced our energy bills by 40%".
- Need to ensure costs of improvements don't fall on individuals' shoulders.
- Lots of small steps can make a big difference – less use of plastic, more insulation, turn the lights off, drive less.
- There is a clear need to reduce consumption – "It's not just a question of swapping fossil fuel for renewables, petrol cars for electric, we need to reduce our consumption as well"

## Ownership

- The profits from our natural resources are continuing to flow out of Wales. We need to tap into growing social enterprise movement in Wales to develop green energy.
- Look at community cooperative developments, alongside not for profit or social ownership models.
- Change cannot be left to individuals or private businesses, it requires state intervention and government investment.

## What else needs to change?

- Need inter-governmental work at all levels, to ensure adequate funding **and** that funding goes to the right place.
- Changing attitudes "I switch the heating down and my wife turns it up".
- Making sure that no-one is disadvantaged financially by e.g. insulating of homes, or changing from gas-fired boilers.
- Need more discussion with local communities and individuals about how we meet the challenge of climate change, and build environmental awareness. Share ideas and experiences locally.



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**I've been an environmentalist for 60 years. I'm always going around turning the heating down.**

# CONCLUSION

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**If we don't act now, all the conferences, plans and discussions in the world will not save us.**

**Discussions were wide-ranging and thoughtful and for me there were some common themes throughout which I would summarise as follows:**

- Action is urgently needed to address the crisis facing the planet.
- **We can all play a part** in helping to address these issues. Changing attitudes important. “Simple steps can make a difference” as one contributor stated.
- Change can be costly and this shouldn't fall on individual shoulders or disadvantage any section of society.
- This change requires considerable government leadership, planning and investment. The state needs to become an active player in the economy.
- A change to greener jobs is urgent and requires a different mind-set about how we organise our society as well as ensure that such jobs are secure and well-paid. We need to be clear about what sort of future society we want.
- There is considerable interest in developing local community owned projects.
- The dangers of increased competition and privatisation is recognised alongside the need for cooperation and public ownership of resources.

It is my belief that this is going to require:

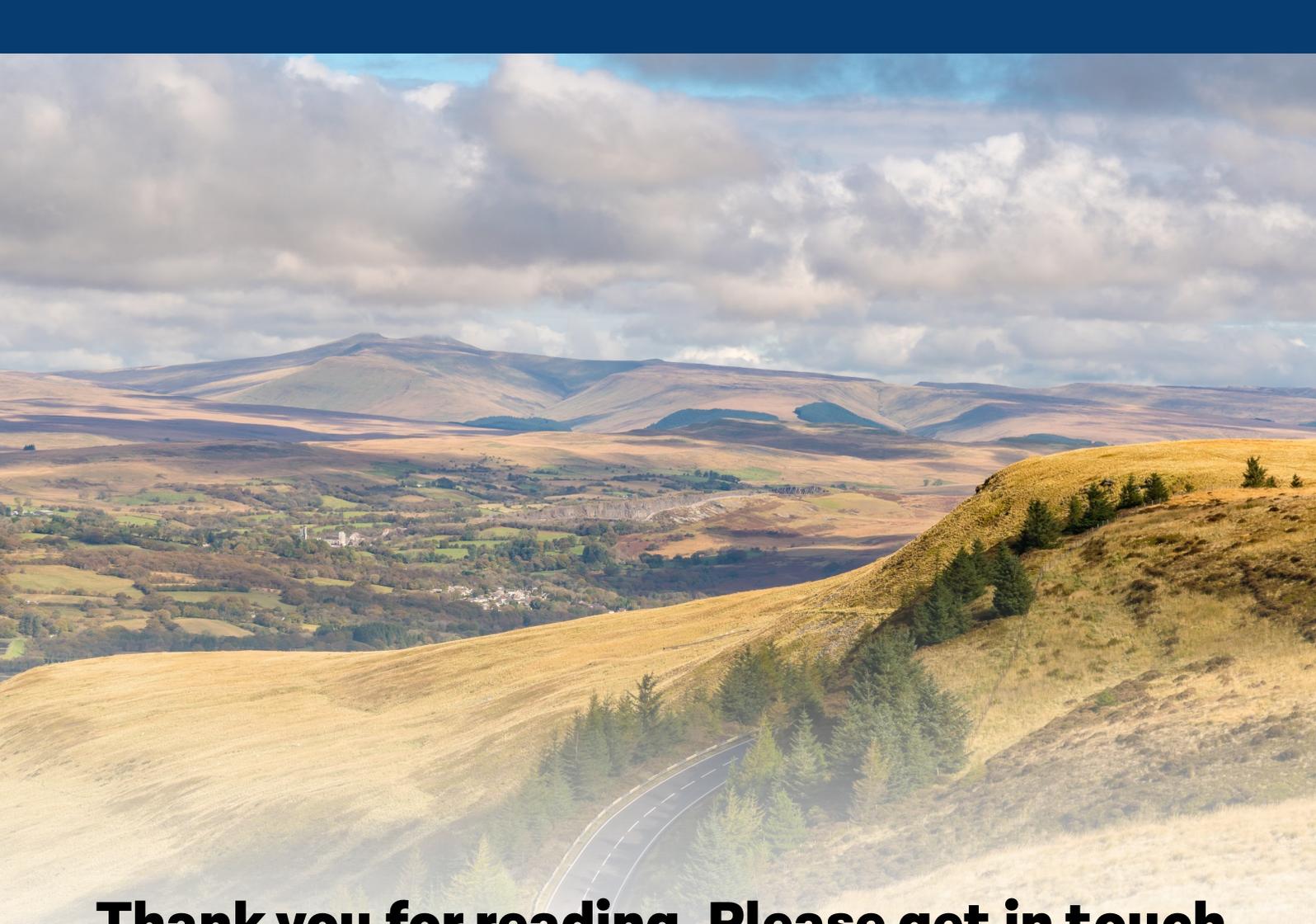
- 1.** The political will and huge government investment to transition to a greener, fairer future for all.
- 2.** That we all – trade unions, politicians, members of the public, all age-groups, voluntary organisations and industry – plan and act together to bring about change

Our main message to COP 26 is that Government support, action and leadership at all levels of government must be forthcoming if major change is to be effected.

If we don't act now, all the conferences, plans and discussions in the world will not save us.

Welsh Government is progressing action for Wales at speed with the appointment of a Minister for Climate Change, and with proposals for ownership of renewable energy, moratorium on building new roads, investment in energy efficient social housing and a range of other developments. In Wales – it's not just talk! We are moving forward. I welcome the Climate Cymru initiative and look forward to submitting this report to Climate.Cymru.

In Cynon Valley, the debate has not ended. We will be watching COP 26 carefully and will re-convene our climate assembly to discuss the outcomes from COP 26 and create our own action plan to press the way forward for us, here in Cynon Valley. **These are our views and we want to develop our own plan for a greener, fairer future for all.**



**Thank you for reading. Please get in touch  
with my office to share your thoughts**

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