

The Climate Majority Project

Theory of Change

Editor's note: *The following is a theory of the change which describes overall conditions under which we (CMP) feel that mainstream serious climate action will emerge and what The Climate Majority Project, as an organisation, is specifically doing in order to help create those conditions in the UK and more widely. It is not a theory of change in the sense normally used among NGOs, which lays out planned actions, their hypothesized effects and key performance indicators. Please contact Liam Kavanagh (lkavanagh@gmail.com) with comments or questions on this document.*

Executive Summary

Creating sufficient public support for system change to avert the worst scenarios of climate collapse requires mass public mobilisation. It therefore requires routes to collective climate action that are accessible and persuasive to a majority of people.

The Climate Majority Project (CMP) is a UK-based organisation aiming **to support a climate-concerned majority of citizens to respond in meaningful, relevant ways to the climate and ecological emergency (CEE)**, catalysing a widespread shift, already underway, towards mainstream climate action and, ultimately, system change.

Climate awareness and concern in the UK have surged in recent years, thanks to the efforts of radical groups like XR, increasing visibility of environmental disasters across the world and extreme weather at home, and the evident failure of institutions to respond appropriately. However, the great majority of the UK public doesn't want to participate in radical protest and research shows that many are turned off by the idea of activism. **A growing majority now see the need for an immediate response and want to play their part, but they often lack awareness of the depth of changes necessary, and the agency to make those changes.** Citizen-led projects for climate action are already emerging, and the CMP works to help them grow in size, mature in vision, and coordinate their actions.

Background: a climate crisis interwoven with a crisis of social organisation.

Established political and industrial institutions currently lack the will and often even the power to limit global warming to below 2°C let alone 1.5. To condone sufficiently deep systemic changes would threaten the established societal and economic order in which they are deeply invested, jeopardising their own position.

The climate movement's radical flank has increased mainstream climate awareness and concern, and through its tactics and tone made climate action in general appear moderate in contrast (the "radical flank effect"). However, the level of public support necessary for appropriately rapid emission reduction and adaptation practices from governments has not been reached. The radical movement's tone, culture and appeal appeal mainly to the 'far left' - a small segment of the population.

Inaction

Institutional expression of climate concern is not matched by confident top-down action. Thus crisis messaging risks breeding complacency among publics who believe that someone high up is acting like there's an emergency, and has the matter in hand. But 'commitments' from governments and institutions are not matched by a will for bold, systemic changes to radically realign e.g. transport, built-environment, food and land use, energy, and industrial and manufacturing sectors towards an ecological civilisation.

Opportunity

If the non-linear climate crisis can surprise us with the speed of unforeseen developments, the same is true of the human social system. Society has begun questioning current ways of life, and the cooperation required to address global overheating and other social ills looks ever more like common sense.

What can we do about it?

We aim to catalyse an inclusive, creative mass movement for climate action. Rather than a neat, linear blueprint for change, we here sketch **four mutually reinforcing strands** that combine to support a necessarily-messy, distributed, collective response:

1. Narrative Shift toward truthfulness

A widespread public narrative that has persistently insisted (across decades) that there is just enough time to 'fix' the climate crisis ("Five to Midnight") delays climate action. It props up belief that deteriorating business-as-usual can continue, *and masks increasing understanding that institutions have already failed to prevent a climate crisis*. The growing segment of the population that shares this understanding must now become aware of how many others share their beliefs. They are the millions who can, together, start climate mobilisation in their workplaces and towns. Locally felt and understood impacts, and IPCC's near admission that a 1.5°C limit is impossible, make it easier to end the Five to Midnight era. Continued denial betrays nations in the global south who immediately need funding for adaptation, loss and damage. The CMP aims to challenge scientists and institutional insiders to be fully honest with the public.

We also need honesty about the state of public support for serious climate action at the policy level, and the means to growing it. Popular attitudes have shifted but not yet enough to motivate responses from hesitant politicians. **Mandates for market intervention towards a costly clean transition must be strengthened, but not through false promises.** We aim to catalyse a new political culture through truthfulness, and the doable action that breeds awareness, community and appetite for change (strands 3-4). Our democracy can be activated by a serious climate majority.

2. Creating cultures of awareness and resilience

Transformative social movements need deep inner resources. To hear, understand and accept the painful truth, negotiate grief and anxiety, and find the will to respond appropriately, factors such as community support, self-care, belonging and resilience are essential. The escalating public health crisis of climate anxiety must be taken seriously and may present an important opportunity to advance the conversation around inner resources. We will work with the therapeutic community and community groups focused on climate and nature, to grow their advocacy. Accessibility is important and care must be taken to avoid addressing the inner challenge in ways perceived as e.g. elitist or coercive. This strand will be expressed differently according to the cultures and practices of those involved.

The climate movement must find a positive perspective on what matters most across many ideological lines. We will therefore cultivate a civil and open dialogue, engaging fully with the emotional challenges of reaching beyond polarisation to build a functioning coalition characterised by mutual respect.

3. Tangible Pragmatic Action: mass activation of citizens in diverse, distributed, mostly self-organising action towards climate mitigation, adaptation, and protection of nature.

Adequate climate response from Government is a massive undertaking requiring resolute planning, coordination and purpose. It hasn't happened, and won't until citizens force governments to act. **We aim to catalyse a coordinated response that starts without the government, inviting everyone to organise wherever they have most agency in life – in workplaces, professions, local communities, extended families, and elsewhere.** Some organisations already exist to channel this action; many more remain to be formed. The change they create at this scale will build momentum for policy change at the highest scale. We do not offer a neat roadmap for this action - people need in the first instance a means of finding mutual support, and together finding the work that is their own to do.

In **geographic communities**, local initiatives for adaptation and resilience can build tangible solutions, improve lives *and* shift consciousness by making real a hitherto abstract issue. Massive scaling up of such activity when it happens will add weight to the democratic argument outlined above.

People spend a huge proportion of their time, energy and power in **the workplace**, and a wide spectrum of change is possible through employee pressure on issues from e.g. investments and pension funds to decarbonising supply chains, commuting and adaptation of premises (and

products). Areas such as law, fund management, insurance, audit and transport are deep leverage points for progress in other sectors. **Businesses** likewise hold considerable lobbying and brand power, and some are already using it to fight climate decline. We aim to support and accelerate this process.

The Climate Majority **Incubator** invests in specific endeavours in this space which show the greatest prospects for leverage and scalability. All such moderate action contains the possibility for escalation if reasonable demands meet resistance.

4. Building Shared Understanding

The developing CMP will be underpinned by an ongoing conversation aimed at making sense of the changing world and of collective action in the long term, listening to our network and evolving the strategic picture. We will include the public in a credible, principled, honest process of shared understanding, rather than presenting a *fete accompli* mission, inappropriate to the hyper-complex task of achieving zero carbon and biodiversity loss. Making sense of our situation together includes understanding how to engage different segments of the population; building on the work of e.g. George Marshall and *Britain Talks Climate*.

While their expression and co-creation will vary widely across diverse segments of the population, the strands of work outlined above can weave together to support a popular, emergent, widely credible climate mobilisation; each strand vitally supporting the others. Their interaction generates potential transformative scalability.

Whereas hopelessness and fragmentation perpetuate inaction on climate in a vicious cycle, the interconnection, empowerment and efficacy created by collectively witnessing and processing the truth, sense-making and tangible action engenders more of the same in a deepening, positive spiral. As these actions multiply they can allow communities in ever greater numbers to find hope and agency, making clearer the inevitability of a deepening, increasingly *active* climate majority.

Introduction

Global overheating has been considered a mounting ‘emergency’ for 30 years but still a potent political response has eluded us. Disturbing changes to the weather are here, natural wonders have been destroyed, and carbon emissions are *still rising*.

The good news is that patience with our institutions is at an all time low, and people are increasingly hungry for new voices. XR has broken the taboo on blunt climate truth-telling, and Greta’s voice echoed much farther than previously possible because people were ready for it. Many people have hesitated to take serious climate action because they’re waiting for the right cues from Government and from each other; sensing perhaps that only a massive movement could be enough, and that such co-operation could only be spurred by tangible catastrophe. They are on the sidelines, ready to be mobilised. Interest in new big ideas is growing, evidenced, for example, by engagement with podcasts. Technological advances mean that climate-dangerous carbon emissions *could* be more quickly reduced now than ever before — if we can finally reach a political decision to choose clean technology at scale. Meanwhile, generations that stand to live most of their lives in serious climate chaos have reached adulthood. How can we rapidly strengthen concerted popular support for effective climate action to grow out of this increasingly fertile ground?

Below we explain why a new **climate majority** is forming, drawing especially from the concerned-but-unengaged populations just mentioned. For now, many of those who constitute this trend are unaware of themselves as such. But we hold that **mainstream climate action will actually succeed when the millions of people who want it understand that they are part of a powerful group and work consciously together**. Eventually a mainstream climate movement will form. The basic question that motivates us is: “how can we catalyse the tip towards mainstream climate action and system change that is already underway?” We offer some thoughts on what people can most effectively do. We hope to encourage others to consider the same question, and connect with the growing numbers who think similar thoughts.

As we’ll discuss, rich opportunities exist for catalysing mainstream serious climate action by strengthening four interwoven strands: **narrative shift towards truthfulness, cultures of awareness and resilience, pragmatic action, and shared understanding**. These strands require and reinforce one another at every level. For example, action and truth telling are mutually supportive: people can only act based on

reality if they know the truth, and they have greater capacity to cope with difficult truth if they perceive (or, better, participate in) a thoughtful and pragmatic response. Both action and truthfulness necessitate collective resilience: we face great difficulty and undertake daunting tasks best together. So this initiative aims to tell the truth credibly (both hard truths about our dire predicament and happier truths about the growing force of the counter-movement), offer pragmatic channels of immediate action with relatively high leverage, and promote belonging to the pragmatic and capable movement that is already emerging, and offering vision, fellow-feeling and emotional support to other members.

Clarifications

As simple as possible; no simpler

Some readers may hope for an A to Z manual of how a Climate Majority can form and bring about serious climate action, complete with a detailed plan for every kind of person. We'd like this too, and we only wish such a comprehensive plan were possible. Instead we discuss what can be done to arrive at the stage where a coherent, climate movement can come together and drive society-wide mobilisation. Such a mobilisation will necessarily be distributed, emergent and bottom-up - i.e. not strictly plannable. This document follows the sage advice to "make things as simple as possible, and no simpler" and also tries to be as precise as possible, but not more precise. A real climate movement will be formed by millions of people finding their own part to play. It will be as complex as any wartime mobilisation; more so, in fact, because it will be less state-led. We recognise (with relief and excitement) that such a movement is underway and rapidly growing, across all sectors, at all levels, and in most parts of the planet. Not least because the weather is calling for change more loudly every year. We are all on a journey into the unknown, encountering dangers--and maybe opportunities--at an unprecedented scale.

Which Climate Majority?

We are UK-based but globally aware. We work to catalyse the growth of a majority for climate action in the UK, which is conscious of being just one part of the global active majority that serious climate action requires. A citizen majority in the UK is already climate concerned - this project aims to create and strengthen channels for its activation.

The climate majority is united by climate concern, however we don't assume that this

majority is homogeneous in its other views, needs and circumstances; and we aren't proposing a neat, "one size fits all" climate movement that is somehow definitively "mainstream". Rather, a core principle of the CMP is supporting people to find the piece of climate action relevant to themselves within a myriad of initiatives; existing and yet-to-be born, specific to people and place.

Background: *What exactly are we up against?*

Now to the (emotionally) hard part — facing up to the status quo.

Public discussions of climate emergency and increasingly alarming scientific warnings are unmatched by urgency in action.

Our blunt assessment, shared by many, is that while established institutions have shown that they cannot mount a sane and effective response to the 'Climate & Ecological Emergency' (CEE), still they manage to preserve their own sense of authority and necessity. The situation we face is inherently uncertain. But we can confidently say this: **no established political or industrial player has the will or power, within the established rules, to ensure the changes necessary to limit warming to 1.5°C or even 2°C, and very few call for changes to systems and rules of power deep enough to allow a response.** Such changes to the established order would threaten that order itself — our current systems of government and of economics — as well as lifestyles of many voters. If a respectable member of the political or industrial elite proposes such changes, they would not remain respectable for long. So, though many insiders do what they can about the climate crisis, without jeopardising their position or the institutions they represent, it isn't nearly enough.

A critical example of the above dynamic is the interaction of institutional politics and science to downplay the severity of human-caused climate change. This *instinct to minimise* a sense of crisis is expressed by the IPCC process, which is speculative and optimistic about carbon capture technology while remaining sceptical about dangerous "non-linearities" in the climate system. There are scientific, sociological and philosophical [critics of the IPCC](#) but nobody wants to jeopardise the IPCC process so, typically, they participate in an institutional dynamic which in effect asks us to remain calm while it fails to produce the urgent action that it admits is necessary. The same instinct shows up in scientists and politicians' claims that "staying below 1.5°C is still possible", while allowing the meaning of "possible" to remain ambiguous. I.e., **meeting**

1.5 is “technically” or “physically” possible, but realising this possibility would require an abrupt and total change in our politics in the very near future. There are absolutely *no* signs of this change. Established institutions have no way of addressing the problem and do not want to say so, for fear of provoking a crisis of confidence. But preserving this dynamic is unwise in the extreme: democracy cannot respond appropriately to a situation if its severity is not publicly understood.

The Radical Response

The radical flank of the climate movement has achieved much in recent years, but there was a great deal *to* achieve in 2018, and so we remain a long way from sane climate goals. XR and Fridays For the Future successfully raised public and elite awareness of the CEE. Against a background of rising public climate concern, they were able to deploy radical tactics and tone that would have earned dismissal only a few years ago; the overall effect making other climate action seem comparatively moderate (a species of the ‘Radical Flank Effect’).

Between 2018 and 2019, the UK public heard an unequivocal message from XR: *you can no longer dismiss dangerous human-caused climate change as not real or not serious*. Rather than curling up in despair, as some predicted, the public became more active and open-minded as radicals “told the truth” regarding climate. Outright climate denial is increasingly rare.

However, whereas XR proposed to create change through direct action protest alone, it seems clear that participation by a very small percentage of the population cannot bring deep changes to a whole political and economic system without *backing* by a popular majority (and some institutions). Though direct action from 2-3.5% of the population has in some cases marked a tipping point where systems change occurred — some of the “Arab Spring” movements, for example — in all these cases, the 2-3.5% *shared goals with a less radical political majority*.

Radical climate movements have succeeded in advancing public awareness of the climate threat, but have not persuaded a majority of the public to share their awareness of *the level and priority* of that threat, let alone to actually join them. This is unsurprising given that in practice these movements have aimed at mobilising the most radical elements of society, fueled by the belief that 3.5 percent of people was enough to bring

about systems change¹. A *far* wider coalition for climate action is necessary. In fact, by attracting an audience highly skewed to the left-wing / 'greens', and through (sometimes deliberately) polarising tactics, the radical flank can become another means of maintaining the status quo. It turns climate realism into yet another facet of immobilising political polarisation, and reinforces a popular image of isolated left-wing / anarchist "doomers" making extreme apocalyptic claims while the 'reasonable rest' remain relatively calm.

The New Inaction

Opinions about the climate emergency have shifted, but inaction persists. Elevated expressions of climate concern are not matched by confident action, in some cases creating conditions for further delay. Across institutional levels, expressions of increased concern arguably further the comforting illusion that institutions may soon take radical action. The IPCC's constant "final warnings" are one example. Likewise, institutionalised emergency-mode messaging such as the UK Parliament's declaration of a Climate and Environment Emergency, select committees piloting Citizen Assemblies and big business making *Net Zero by 2050* pledges have increased visibility and concern, but encouraged false hope of establishment action, thus breeding public complacency. All of this continues a pattern already well established well before the Paris treaty: institutional commitments unmatched by a will to engage with the challenges of implementation.

Meanwhile the public, whether waiting for cues from each other and their government, or soothed by promises of 'just in time' solutions, remain emotionally distant from the issue, and broadly inactive. XR has shifted popular opinions but its roster of committed activists has stopped growing, with participation falling drastically short 3.5% of the population deemed necessary to bring about systems change^[1].

Our purpose in laying out the grim tale above is not to cast institutional insiders as "the bad guys" or radicals as failures. We do mean to urge widespread acceptance that **intellectual agreement with the idea of a climate crisis is not translating to action, because of subtle and unwitting ways in which we and our institutions cooperate to give each other the impression that everything is ok.** We ask readers to reflect upon the potential of more deeply felt public awareness to open new fields of possibility for action; and to join us in challenging this complacent calm, to

¹ XR's original strategy held that 3.5% of the population was required to bring about civil disobedience and so broad appeal was unnecessary. As of spring 2023 XR has recognised that broader appeal is necessary

galvanise the formation of a truly potent climate majority.

A new window of opportunity

The good news is that a lot of people have noticed the inability of our governments and economic systems to appropriately address the climate and other societal crises. They've been talking about it — a lot — and inventing their own responses. As this sentiment and action builds it can lead to a “non-linearity” in the human social system: similar to those seen in the climate system, but vastly more welcome. Deep social change was scoffed at 30 years ago when climate change first became a mainstream news item, however it is increasingly viewed as possible, desirable, and even inevitable. The word “polycrisis” - a term that encapsulates the current set of ecological breakdowns, economic turmoil, information breakdowns, and institutional distrust and signals the need for a major change in the global order - has become a “new global buzzword¹.” The idea has appeared in the pages of the Financial Times² and many other mainstream publications³, not to mention the agenda and publications of EU and UN agencies⁴ and civil society organisations⁵, and even formed the theme of the World Economic Forum's most recent annual meeting in Davos⁶.

As people realise that business-as-usual, politics-as-usual, and thinking-as-usual have hit a wall, opportunities arise as people look for new voices articulating new routes to a sane future. Scouring podcasts for non-mainstream views is itself becoming a fairly mainstream activity. Technological innovation continues at a great pace, but is increasingly matched by voices questioning the assumption that technology alone can solve our more-than-problem. The idea that market forces can deliver green lifestyles at scale is being questioned, even among conservative audiences. The understanding that widespread popular cooperation to halt global overheating is needed *and could even provide a model for cooperation on other international problems* will, in this environment, become more and more commonsense. At the same time a great number of people are starting to realise that life might be better if it were simpler, if communities were stronger, and if incomes were more stable and secure.

What might we do about it?

We propose to catalyse the mainstream climate movement that is underway and whose strengthening is inevitable. A movement is forming of people drawn from and speaking to many walks of life. Working at both institutional and popular levels, finding common cause and getting started on what clearly needs doing while figuring out what else

needs to be done. Deteriorating weather and continuing inaction will drive recognition that waiting for institutions and “leaders” to address the situation is futile, and more people will get on with the task at hand. A movement that aims to include all who are worse off in a climate catastrophe, and knows that this means almost everybody, whether they know it or not. The emergent movement needs to be large and creative, **and it will be, because the worsening climate situation is pushing us towards a social tipping point in climate awareness and action.** It will come from many people finding their own way to contribute, in communication with others. The question is whether it will be fast enough. CMP exists to humbly do our best to ensure the answer to that question is “yes.”

The public we seek to bring together is diverse, with diverse circumstances, opportunities and capacities - and those involved are at different stages on their own “climate journey” - from newly concerned to fully engaged. Accordingly our theory of change can’t be understood as linear, X leading to Y leading to Z. Rather, we see interacting ‘strands’ of a rope: none sufficient by itself, but *together*, strong enough to pull enormous weight.

Four strands

- **Narrative Shift**
Shifting climate conversations further towards truthfulness, regarding both the depth of challenges faced and emerging responses. Thus fostering the motivation and understanding needed to break the inertia discussed above.
- **Collective Resilience**
Cultivating the community and resources that can underpin mutual support through inevitably difficult experiences and emotions, and the belonging, co-concern and shared endeavour that can take us from despair to determination.
- **Tangible Actions**
Pragmatic and well thought-out ways that people together can make specific changes, turning concern into meaningful climate action.
- **Building Shared Understanding**
An ongoing, inclusive, agenda-setting conversation lays the groundwork for tomorrow’s tangible actions, and surveys the shifting social landscape. In particular, people involved in mainstream climate action need shared understanding of how their personal (local) actions play a role in global efforts by millions - giving individuals confidence that their efforts are not wasted.

These four strands weave together to create the confident mainstream action we sorely need. They are how we help each other cope, build resilience in our communities and become deeply motivated to energetically undertake cocreated potent responses to the climate emergency. Participants' interactions with these strands will be unique and dependent on circumstance.

We discuss each in turn below, but must first caution again that this theory of change does not pretend to be a *blueprint* for change. As much as one might like to believe otherwise, the means by which our society as a whole will address climate breakdown is a big, messy, emergent question. The next big thing won't be just one thing; it will be lots of 'little' things, broadly aligned: the activated climate majority will be radically plural.

We offer principles and processes for change rather than a complete strategy. We cannot speak on behalf of the group that is going to form; as we noted earlier, this theory of change is about getting to the stage where a coherent, climate movement can come together and drive society-wide mobilisation. We speak for ourselves, while aiming to offer deep reframings and emergent thought leadership that we hope will prove valuable to others.

We will discuss each of the four strands bulleted above in turn, outlining how they are necessary for a popular, emergent, widely-credible climate mobilisation, and the particular actions that we, as a small group (at this point), intend to take on each front.

In doing so we remain deeply aware that the expression of these strands will vary according to different 'segments' of the population. The complex cultural differences the climate movement must bridge are just one more reason why we are so wary of proposing any theory of change that might sound simple and neat. We discuss these differences briefly near the end of the document, not because they are unimportant but because they are too intricate to adequately tackle in a short document.

Strand 1: Narrative Shift towards Truthfulness

A motivated climate majority requires communication that relays the gravity of the climate emergency. Millions of people making effective plans together

necessitates truthful communication, not 'elite' figures telling people what they need to hear. The truthfulness we need includes naming institutional barriers to addressing climate change.

A truth that needs to be said clearly, by all those who know it, is this: *we must let go of the belief that there is still time to 'fix the climate'*. All is not lost, and every fraction of a degree of warming we can now prevent is critically important - but some valuable things *are already* lost, and some targets are no longer attainable. Denial of this fact props up trust that institutions can still deliver safety, when they have already failed. We've been told that it is "five minutes to midnight" for years and years; the climate story is stuck on repeat. But in reality the climate clock has always been moving. How much further it moves matters a great deal, but we cannot pretend that it isn't now past midnight.

Inevitably, this is an alarming new story that many would rather not hear, or dwell on. Nonetheless, many already *sense* it at some level. Most of us know the truth, at the fringes of our awareness; in nagging anxiety that rises with each regular report of freakish weather. Each person who breaks the hegemonic social silence on accepting climate chaos makes it easier for others to bring it out into the open; the illusion that business-as-usual can go on becoming harder to maintain.

This truth is easier to tell now that the IPCC all but admits that 'climate-safety', the hospitable climate of our ancestors, is now in history's rear view mirror. The idea that '1.5° is still alive' depends on the appearance of technology that has yet to be invented². It is even more fanciful politically, dependent as it is on abrupt action by the same old institutions. If we are at the very brink of 1.5 now, then concerted reductions should have started long ago. Mostly they didn't. There should be thoughtful plans *in place*, but there are not. James Hansen, the former director of NASA who first emphasised the climate threat to US policy-makers, has declared that "there is no chance whatever" of staying below 1.5°, and more and more experts are now publicly urging acceptance that the Paris agreement has failed in its objective of keeping us safe from dangerous climate change. We agree.

Climate effects that are now inevitable in 'frontline' states in the global South, are finessed with soft-denialist pretences that 1.5° is still possible, *while the dire need for*

²See Kevin Anderson (2016), The Trouble with Negative Emissions
<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aah4567> and 2020 or a more recent interview at
https://www.kontext-tv.de/en/Kevin_Anderson_Climate_Targets
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14693062.2020.1728209>

adaptation (let alone seriously accounting for 'loss and damage') is denied and delayed. There will never be adequate funding for transformative adaptation so long as populations are complacently assured that 'there is still time' to limit warming to a "safe" 1.5°. Thus the rigorous truthfulness that constitutes our first strand is essential to achieving any kind of climate justice.

But it is also untruthful, and dangerously hubristic, to suggest that rich societies in the global North are immune from the need for transformative climate adaptation. This attitude is found even among some climate justice activists: it never seems to cross some minds that we here - especially perhaps the poorest among us - may also turn out to be on 'the climate frontline'. In the dawning age of endemic climate-related disasters, the Covid emergency should have been a warning shot across our bows, revealing starkly the fragility in (poorly-governed) 'developed' countries, while poor countries in (e.g.) west Africa and east Asia proved relatively robust. Societies such as the UK that heavily depend on long supply chains can expect to feel heavily coming disruptions in e.g. world food production.

We seek a shift in understanding of human-caused climate change away from abstract, distant and slow physical impacts (sea level rise, glacier melt, etc), to nearer-term and locally understood impacts (food security, pandemics, mass migrations, etc.). The climate crisis won't be a spectator sport.

A line in the sand

Though we are almost certain to cross a danger line (1.5°) that our institutions drew themselves, scientific communities and most political 'leaders' remain generally reluctant to level with the general public.¹ The decision to maintain optimism by softening facts represents a gamble vastly at odds with how the public manages and outsources other risks in everyday life. For example, *Public Health England* recommends that we live a healthy life; rather than get drunk and eat junk food every day on the optimistic expectation that by 2050 our ruined health will be restored by a speculative wonder-pill. Nobody wants to live in buildings or fly in planes built by 'optimistic' engineers or architects, but we are building the future of our planet around wildly optimistic assumptions. Currently this ill-advised gamble is not explicitly acknowledged. We believe that it must be.

A good deal of evidence supports the idea that the scientific establishment shies away from telling disturbing truths. Start with the IPCC's belated admission of dangerous feedback cycles, its brief acceptance of 2.0° C as an acceptable risk on political rather than scientific grounds, its willingness to rely on speculative tech in forecasting carbon reductions, and finish with widely repeated statements by science's top climate communicators that the public must at all costs not be panicked.

We propose to shine a light on clear evidence of institutional reticence. Many routes exist to do so in different contexts, however we imagine specifically a challenge to institutional insiders that the public deserves honesty, and must be spoken to like adults. This is the entry point for a particular campaign (in design at time of writing, following a collaborative [exploration](#)) that challenges the scientific and political leadership to "level with" the public about what they really think. **Trusted figures who express awareness of institutional failure openly should not appear as pessimistic "outliers" but as they are: a minority brave enough to say out loud what the majority think.**

Truth and agency - a generative interaction

Some prominent voices in the climate space resist this level of realism, on the basis that it leads to doomism and inaction. However these concerns were also present before Greta Thunberg's statements "I want you to panic" and "the house is on fire, the house is on fire" earned her praise as an inspiring hero, rather than a depressing doomer. Similarly, such concerns about the danger of truth-telling would not have predicted XR's success. There are many theories about why XR hasn't achieved its goals but we've heard no one say that the reason was that XR was too truthful. Similarly, we believe that the ongoing emergence of citizen climate action (strand 3) testifies to public robustness in the face of truth. An increasingly widespread suspicion that things are worse than governments admit on climate - and moreover, that governments aren't about to produce a response - is leading citizens to look around and ask what they themselves can do. As such actions become visible to others, the basis for a truthful societal narrative likewise grows stronger.

The Truth about Top-down Change: the role of a revitalised electorate.

The truthful messaging we need also includes honesty about the the state of public support for serious climate action at policy level, and the challenges we face in growing it. The

idea that a few of us can get those at the top to “just change” has underwritten climate tactics for a long time, and has been unrealistic. More concerned voters are now required to force politicians to face the difficulties of climate action or be replaced; and to show scientists that full truth will not fall on deaf ears. This statement may be surprising, given that attitudes towards climate have improved so much lately. Some even wonder if awareness raising is still a relevant aim for climate organisers. We stress that popular awareness has risen *and* that it must rise still more. **Rather than exaggerate public support in the name of optimism, we should organise to accelerate public support for climate action till it reaches levels high enough to overcome inertia, doubt, and organised political opposition. We, the electorate, must fulfil the climate emergency’s full potential for reinvigorating us; renewing our faith that democracy can work — because it must.**

Polls show that a majority of people are concerned about climate and nature, especially after recent bouts of extreme weather such as record heat waves and droughts in the UK. In 2022 polls, 32% of the population said they were very worried, while 44% were somewhat worried about man-made climate change. The question is: are they concerned enough to undertake the difficulties of climate action? Encouragingly, about two-thirds of voters support tax rises to pay for carbon mitigation and a majority support a tax that would make CO₂-producing products pricier. But another poll in 2021, *before* the cost of living crisis, asked more specific questions about paying more and got less encouraging answers. Most respondents did not support increasing the cost of gas, petrol or meat. Politicians are understandably hesitant to take responsibility for ambitious policies when the public supports these in the abstract, but objects to feeling their effects. In short, *polls show that there is already a climate majority - but our resolve badly needs deepening.*

The public’s seeming inconsistency is quite understandable. A major concern is whether higher prices for fossil fuels in the UK *really* help lower world CO₂ emissions. Unilateral adoption of such taxes would not ensure that the world will follow suit, a fact consistently mentioned among segments of the public (for instance in our own audience research) less idealistic than the progressives who traditionally dominate climate action. Given their preferences, a better question to ask the public might be whether they are willing to undertake the costs of a fast transition to net zero in order for Britain to show climate leadership and inspire other nations. Until super-majorities answer “yes” to that question then it is easy to understand why politicians do not take strong action. A display of leadership is all that anybody can *promise* that a UK-only clean transition will produce in the short term. There is good reason to suspect other nations will join us but

advocates for climate action won't inspire confidence by trying to pass swiftly over concerns that costly national heroics could be internationally ignored.

We should remind ourselves of the political obstacles that an alliance of climate-concerned citizens must overcome. Both ideological aversion to government intervention in markets and the cost of carbon mitigation present significant hurdles. Achieving zero emissions will require strong new regulations that many in the business community fear will normalise stronger interventions in industry affairs. Climate action inherently threatens the ideology which asserts that markets left to themselves inevitably produce the best result. Public support for this ideology has been crumbling since 2008, and many business leaders see its limits, but its proponents are well organised and well funded, and (so) it has a good deal of presence in the media. Voters can overpower this ideology, but public support must be high enough to overcome inevitable pushback.

Though it is fashionable to say that transition to a low carbon economy is now possible because "clean tech is better/cheaper" let's be clear; a rapid transition to renewables will still require policy support and be expensive. Furthermore a reduction in energy demand, which many argue, compellingly, is essential to enable sustainability, will require substantive lifestyle changes. Just because electric cars are competitive with fossil-burning cars now does not mean that you can replace your fossil-burning car without much extra cost. Switching would mean buying a new electric car even if you already have a perfectly serviceable fossil-burning one. This is exactly the position of a power company that has an old fossil-burning power plant but would like to replace it with a renewable power source. "Throwing out" the old plant that they already paid for and were planning to use for a decade or more replacing it with a new plant means significant unplanned spending for the same benefit.

The cost of a quick switch to clean power plants will be paid for by *somebody* just as surely as the cost of replacing all cars would be. While with the right policy steps it *could* be possible to avoid costs being shifted to citizens, we understand scepticism over that possible outcome given past experience. We're not saying that power plants should not be replaced; rather that an effort to make the UK grid 100% renewable in record time will not necessarily come without extra cost for most citizens. At some level people know this, which is why simple claims that we should "go renewable now, because renewables are cheaper" may not build trust in climate campaigners. We think people have had enough of being "messed to" with hopeful-sounding falsehoods. Respectful honesty is a better approach.

For all these reasons we claim that, in order to bring into being a new political class we need a reinvigorated electorate. Our theory of change aims to support that political renewal; catalysing the transformation of our political culture by prioritising truthfulness, as well as the participation, collaboration and shared understanding written through our other three strands. In advocating an end to hopeful dishonesty we aren't promoting pessimism - rather we are profoundly optimistic about the effects of truthfulness.

To claim that there is already solid majority support for serious climate action would likewise be a hopeful exaggeration of the kind we warn against - after all, if such voter support exists, why hasn't serious climate action at the policy level already begun? Some answer (for example in focus groups) that the popular voice simply doesn't matter - however we find this dangerously cynical. Rather we counsel acceptance that public support of the right (serious, active) kind is genuinely lacking - for now. Nonetheless we think that our imperfect democracies *can* be swung into action when a serious, determined climate majority makes its voice heard. Only when they are truly demanded can the hardest policy decisions be made.

Thus far in regard to public attitudes we have highlighted only the comparatively easy aspects of necessary transformation: a transition to renewable energy. The full picture is considerably more complex and challenging: for example, dispute is ongoing whether anything remotely resembling our current economy, or its level of energy-availability, is tenable on a completely renewable basis. Furthermore, leaving our economic system to run as it has, with just a few small adjustments to draw down emissions, will guarantee another disaster, already underway, in terms of [biodiversity](#). Part of the public narrative shift so desperately needed is the understanding that climate, already a wicked more-than-problem, is only one planetary limit among many pressing fast upon us, and only a symptom of a much broader disease of civilisational mal-organisation.

Realistically, we do not expect large-scale agreement in the near term about how our way of life must change so that it can be passed onto future generations. But it is time to discuss openly the cracks that we all have seen forming in the foundation. Our first strand, then, is about cutting to the chase, and overcoming the temptation, still widespread, to soft denial. This is the necessary first step towards agreement on the bold action we need to take.

A change to clear truthful messaging will not of itself lead to sea change in climate action. As mentioned, a truthful narrative-shift forms one key strand of a rope that must gradually be woven, leading to a new future. The next strand helps us to handle the truth:

Strand 2: Communities of Awareness and Resilience

In a time of unprecedented turbulence, a Climate Majority that engages with the truth will need the inner skills and support to navigate difficult experiences and strong emotions.

While much climate action focuses on solutions to material problems, it serves neither our efficacy nor our resilience to treat psychological and emotional factors as if they were not part of the real world. Read any account of successful politics in adversity, and you'll sense for example the necessity for community support, an ability to speak the truth both powerfully and without hatred, and skill for shared self-care. Figures like Gandhi, Mandela, and King are just a few well-known examples. It is strange that while these leaders are feted, and the centrality of their inner capacities to their accomplishments is so well-known, no lesson is typically drawn that successful transformative social movements must support psychological resources. We aspire to change that.

Whether considering collaboration and change at a mass level, or facing difficult choices and painful climate consequences as a society, understanding and support of inner capacities are crucial considerations at all levels of a movement. And in a space of uncertainty and rapid change, where responsibility weighs heavy and plans are prone to falling apart, organisers have a particular need for inner stability and shared practices for grounding and resilience-building. Whereas emotional dependence on particular stances, plans and strategies breeds resistance to change, the stability we find in community and strong internal resources will allow us to adjust our perspectives and strategies as often and as deeply as we'll need to.

Supporting truth-hearing to become truth-knowing

The CMP will not succeed in raising much-needed awareness by brow-beating those who deny climate change or its implications and ambushing them with the truth. Really listening to truth entails accepting existential threat and personal responsibility within a complex, unsustainable system, and dealing with significant anxiety. We must therefore organise to genuinely support each other in facing a common threat and counteracting feelings of isolation and helplessness.

In fact, the word "denial" itself, with its negative associations, may not even serve us. It

is entirely human to find more optimistic versions of the facts appealing. Most of us experience some urge to subtly reframe facts to make climate change less threatening and easier to address, and to exaggerate our own ability to “solve” it. The “stubborn optimist” view that existing political processes (such as the CoP systems) will suddenly deliver big supportive policy-shifts, like the belief that the issue can be solved later with future tech, are entirely understandable. It is a laborious process to separate the versions of the facts that withstand scrutiny from the versions that simply feel good. This is best done with the help of others who listen closely and raise objections carefully and with empathy.

As per twelve step programmes, grief counselling and support groups, accepting the situation and facing its depth can be the first step to dealing with it, but acceptance is itself a process that can't be short-circuited. The opportunity to speak one's mind and be heard by supportive others is widely understood to be helpful in accepting virtually any difficult situation whether an unwelcome medical diagnosis, an addiction, or a neighbourhood tragedy.

We do not need to invent such opportunities to talk about and ‘process’ climate breakdown – they already exist (and multiply daily). A large number of initiatives already provide a space to feel into and to face the fears that come with contemplating environmental catastrophe. These range from the edgier (e.g. Deep Adaptation and the Dark Mountain Project) to the more disarming and familiar climate-informed offerings (e.g. psychologists’ Climate Cafes). Some of these groups use methods drawn from psychology, and others from wisdom traditions (e.g. Christian and Buddhist groups). Others still use methods developed from within the environmental movement. It may be that this emerging movement of inner work simply needs to acquire an identity in the public mind; to become recognized as “a thing that people (need to) do”. Just as e.g. ‘mindfulness’ has progressed a long way in social acceptance over the last decade, mental ‘climate resilience’ needs to become mainstream.

The public health crisis of climate anxiety may present an opportunity to advance this conversation. 75% of the UK populations is worried about the climate (32% very worried), with 5% worrying enough to impair their day-to-day functioning.⁸ This figure rose to 28% among a study focused on young people⁹. In particular, today's youth know they will be dealing with the age of consequences in what should have been their best years so their anxiety is rational.

Our first action under this strand is to work with both the therapeutic community and

community groups focused on climate, linking them together with media-savvy advocates (therapists are not particularly well positioned to be their own advertisers) to help such work grow its profile. This action is in process as we write [Spring 2023].

Conversations about shared resilience require the utmost care, because mental health concerns are traditionally marginalised, as are valuable practices (like mindfulness) that can be (mis)perceived as elitist, coercive, distracting or ‘woo-woo’. Discussion of psychological resilience can become a barrier if it takes place in an inaccessible vocabulary – and we must respect that such resilience is highly personal and there is not one correct way to approach it. The CMP must publicly speak about the core aspects of the inner challenge clearly and accessibly, while understanding that communities of support will use a variety of vocabularies suited to their members’ own culture and practices.

Values for a climate aware majority

For deep societal change, a majority of the population needs to work together which means bridging the divides of our polarised societies. Being together with those we disagree with stretches our minds and hearts in **difficult** but ultimately rewarding ways. The following are values we see as crucial for building The Climate Majority.

Respect

Differences in political ideology, cultural background and knowledge are all challenging, but if we let them breed contempt we cannot build the movement we need. Respect does not mean avoiding disagreement, but avoiding animosity. In fact it is because there are so many disagreements to have and to resolve in so little time that we need respect.

We have all heard spiritual leaders talk about the need to respect and even love people whose beliefs and behaviour we don’t approve of, but the advice of professional diplomats and hostage negotiators may be more convincing to some “tangibly-minded” readers. People in these roles learn to respect and empathise with the people that they must negotiate with. Acting as though we respect people is what most of us do, but the best way to treat others respectfully is to actually respect them.

Build coalitions, not moral superiority.

The need to be “in the right” is the deepest cause of disrespect and discord in coalitions. If we remember that we, like most people, are likely to be wrong about something, it is easier to give up pursuing the victory of our viewpoint as our main goal, and to accept the messy task of finding our way to the least imperfect world that we can reach together. Self-righteousness feeds a sense of superiority on one side, and resentment and acrimony on the other: even self-righteous respectfulness and pragmatism. Important inner work includes managing the impulse to attack a person who we think has said something foolish, or to demonstrate our own

intellectual or moral superiority by using a severely corrective tone or by offering long-winded explanations of self-evident facts. Tiny acts of care and respect can build a coalition.

Relinquishing ownership of the “climate issue”

The cultural norms and sensitivities of progressive groups tend to dominate the activist space, and so climate action groups have tended to attract progressives. In order to build a mainstream climate movement, we have much to learn from the people who have been working in the space of dangerous climate change *and* from others who have not. Nearly everybody stands to lose from climate breakdown so a mainstream movement should be ready to make almost anybody feel at home. Accepting people as part of a climate movement without asking them to agree with climate activists about every issue is a sign that we are really serious about mainstream climate action.

Joy

We need satisfaction and joy to carry on. In fact neuroscience shows that positive feelings are the way our mind and body tell us “*keep going*.” If our own reward system is not saying this, then eventually, we will stop moving. The drive of martyrdom only lasts so long, and joyless people do not set an inspiring example to those who have not yet started their journey.

We should remember that people listen to others because of their non-verbal bearing, their particular presence, as much as anything. Feeling genuinely centred and happy is also the best signal we can have that we are doing the right and necessary thing. To do difficult work it is important to learn to enjoy life moment to moment, so that we don't need things to happen as we hope or intend in order to keep going.

Meeting each other as we are

Everybody has their own journey towards realising and accepting the gravity of the climate and ecological crises - we can't expect others to share our views or our journey. A coalition for building a better future will consist of relatable messengers capable of reaching audiences the climate movement has historically found difficult to reach. We want to help people come to terms with the crisis in their own way, identify ambitious useful actions that make the best use of their own talents, and feel part of something larger. In the process of building consensus around mainstream climate action, most people's beliefs (including ours) will change. If we establish the right kind of conversational environment, and bonds of trust, then truth will win out, eventually.

Patience

It is hard to be patient given what is at stake. But patience is necessary in order to meet people where they are and treat them respectfully. Moreover, as it becomes ever clearer that 'we don't have time', yet still we will have to do the best we can in the time actually available. Reconciling how horribly late it is with suboptimal rates of progress is a necessary aspect of realism and is part of our work.

Strand 3: Tangible Pragmatic Actions

A large and growing number of newly climate-concerned citizens has the will and capacity to make a difference in how institutions operate, through well-chosen, practical channels appropriate to their own circumstances.

The most common question we encounter when talking to concerned citizens is: “What can I *do*?” The Climate Majority we see forming will involve mass mobilisation of citizens via diverse, distributed, mostly self-organising action for climate mitigation, adaptation, and protection of nature; **combining to drive change at all different institutional levels**. Our own task is not only to support and catalyse them but also crucially to *successfully communicate a sense of the movement’s aggregate leverage*, such that participants and decisionmakers alike can understand its true size and impact (see strand 4).

The kind of citizen initiatives we describe are already emerging. By acting as a catalyst we don’t suggest that we will be responsible for mainstream climate action: it will continue to arise spontaneously as climate disruption impinges ever further on daily life, but its pace can be quickened. As we’ll discuss, the aggregated power of such groups of organised people can change policy where possible now, and through visibly successful, smaller-scale actions, build momentum for policy change at the highest level as soon as possible (which, we accept, may not be soon).

The catch-22 of climate (in)action

In theory, our government and elected officials are supposed to recognise and understand the seriousness of threats like climate breakdown, and respond adequately. This undertaking requires many people to work together, well coordinated and with a clear plan and purpose. Something like a wartime mobilisation, allowing individuals to participate in something bigger than themselves, and support a national effort to tackle a problem affecting everyone. Needless to say this has not happened, and it won’t until governments are forced to draw up these plans by citizens. However, people must fully accept the situation before they can confront the government, and most do not want to think about it because they don’t feel they can do something about it. They feel

incapable. Because there is no coordination – which surely needs the government. This is the catch-22 of climate (in-)action.

A coordinated citizen response

What we need in the near term, then, is a coordinated response that starts *without* the government. People doing whatever can be done without policy support. The core element of the Climate Majority Project is an invitation to everyone to organise, wherever they have most agency, power or leverage, in your life. This may be within your extended family, your neighbourhood, your workplace, your profession, or in some other way.

In some cases, the right organisations already exist - for example, in the workplace, groups like Lawyers For Net Zero (for corporate lawyers), and perhaps certain Trade Unions, if they are capable of prioritising the climate crisis above short-term self-interest. Where the right, capable, salient organisation already exists, the task is straightforward: join and actively support it. In most other cases, the task is to self-organise.

The precise form of this work will be determined by its many participants, but at the outset we see a few things that are needed. Firstly, people need a means of finding others. With mutual support, climate concern can be drawn to the forefront of their mind and attention where it can drive action. Secondly, a great number of people must undertake a journey of *finding the work that is theirs to do*, along with others. We do not offer a grand unified plan for change or anything like it. Extinction Rebellion's initial plan to get 3.5 percent of the population out on the street was so motivating and unifying because it gave a simple and clear plan for 'solving' the climate crisis. But as XR has lately understood, before changing strategy to reach a broader population, simple and clear plans to solve complex conundrums have a way of being attractive but ultimately inadequate³. Complexity is another thing we must have the courage to accept.

Climate agency through vigorous pragmatism

As the philosopher Roberto Unger notes,⁴ political debate tends to swing between “practical” but uninspiring marginal changes or inspiring but impractical utopian visions. The work we propose charts a middle path.

³ Paraphrasing H.L. Mencken

⁴ We note that Unger does not take climate breakdown as a serious threat, but this does not undermine his relevance here.

In contrast to the radical climate movement, the CMP will not concentrate, in the near term, on demanding that national or international governmental institutions make the deepest required changes (macro level). Instead we encourage taking the boldest and most important steps that are possible *now*, and which will make more steps possible later. In practice this means thousands of people creating change *at the highest institutional level they can*. This could mean changes in communities, workplaces, faith groups, universities and targeted aspects of national government “today” and sweeping changes in national governments policies “tomorrow” It can also include policies amenable to today’s politics that would allow a climate majority to form more quickly (see Box on mental health.) Our attitude of realism accepts that major macro changes aren’t likely in the short term via current methods but that we may build towards them via tangible successes at different institutional levels. This really is a marathon, not a sprint. Or better, it’s a relay race: some people must do the running today so that others can do it tomorrow.

Similarly, realism forbids focus on individual changes in consumer behaviour. Sufficient change by individuals, unsupported by institutions, is extremely unlikely. Furthermore a key barrier to entry into active change-making is a (justified) sense that what one does alone will not be very meaningful.

Initially, then, the CMP will effect change through intermediate institutional action; operating within core arenas of *collective* agency - particularly, but not limited to **workplaces** (including businesses and professions) and **geographic communities**^[2]. The constituency participating in this action will both take direct responsibility for leading and implementing practical change, and use tangible successes, influence, and organisation to generate more collective agency and enable action at higher levels. All contributing in turn to change in the political culture at large. The hard job of finding our way to great change in short steps requires a long-term commitment, deep thinking and cohesiveness in a movement. Such a collaboration may be unusual, but so is our situation - so this is the kind of collaboration, we thoroughly believe, that wants to form.

Geographic communities

Activity in geographic communities will tend towards local initiatives for adaptation, resilience, and improvements in quality of living (which is not at all the same thing as expanded material consumption). Adaptation has received little attention in mainstream

consideration of climate response, because it breaks the taboo against accepting the reality of climate chaos. Emphasis on adaptation and preparedness can powerfully shift consciousness by connecting us with our vulnerability in ways that strategies for ‘fixing’ climate decline [do not](#). After all, if we are *adapting* to something, then for sure it’s real, and important. Because this shift in consciousness can catalyse all kinds of further climate action (hence *transformative* adaptation), adaptation for resilience will take high priority for the CMP.

For many, [community climate action](#) will be a natural way to embody leadership, especially because engagement in forms of transformative adaptation and resilience building, has potential to activate many others. As a first rate example, the CMP incubator is supporting [Community Climate Action, an organisation offering citizens routes to highly tangible, meaningful action. Scaled up, such organisations have extraordinary transformative potential.](#)

The workplace

Compared to civil society and the political realm, the professions and labour generally remain quiet on climate and nature. Most people still spend half of their waking weekday hours at work (even if for many of us work now takes place at home). An enormous portion of our power is exercised in this context. CMP efforts will direct some of that time and energy towards employee-driven change from within relevant organisations.

Workplaces offer wide possibilities for change: from how and whether employees commute to how profits and pension-funds are invested; from sustainable adaptation and location of premises and decarbonising in supply chains to the nature of products and their tendency to do harm or good. It is a small tragedy that the climate movement has not made itself synonymous with work-from-home rules, hugely popular among most employees. Some areas of employment represent particularly crucial pinch-points in the system: these include for example the law, pension-fund management, insurance, audit, and transport. Shifts in priorities and operations within these areas can precipitate rapid progress across other sectors, and the MF aims to focus especially on areas of highest leverage.

Business wields real, massive power: crucially lobbying as well as brand power. Harnessing this power and influence is ever more realistic as the foundations of business become increasingly vulnerable to climate impacts. Concerned businesses can draw down their emissions significantly within existing rules but must also lobby

for new rules that would force all emissions to zero — both their own and those of competitors: levelling the playing field is necessary to avoid a race to the bottom. This suggests an important hook for media: for, for business (including finance) to turn around and declare state/system failure, to call for its own better and more stringent regulation in the interest of self-preservation rather than asking for regulatory exemptions, is an eminently newsworthy “man bites dog” moment. Employees in workplace efforts can have real influence in national policy by turning their employer into a lobbyist for new, sane market rules.

Encouraging signs

Some businesses are already well down this track: a striking example is Patagonia, whose owner recently took this principle to its logical conclusion and [gave the company away](#) to sink its capital into the struggle against climate decline.

Our own experience thus far in presenting a Five-Past-Midnight narrative to open-minded business-people upholds the proposition that narrative shift, resilience and pragmatic action support one another. Within a sufficiently supportive environment, once business leaders are given the opportunity to understand the depth of the problem, the impossibility of sufficient quick-wins, their organisations’ vulnerability and the failure of government ‘leadership’, their minds and hearts tend to open toward meaningful action. Conversely, the visibility of pragmatic options makes it easier to accept and operate within a new narrative. Serious contemplation of climate action starts when both awareness of the issue and the possibility of response come to the fore. Most are relieved to hear that there is a way forward that does not involve glueing themselves to the M25 (which they are not willing to do). As explain in strand 4, what many businesses still need is a sense that their action will truly be part of something that is large enough to matter, and therefore worth undertaking.

Moderate ‘direct action’ and potential for escalation

We prioritise the reasonable, legal actions of citizens, in their own initiatives for practical climate action. Many people are now hungry to take part in such meaningful positive action. If and when these eminently reasonable asks and actions are resisted however, potential exists to ratchet up collective action to a more assertive level. For instance, transformative adaptation initiatives that meet government resistance may consider escalating to NVDA to enable their goals. ‘Wild Card’ is another CMP incubatee which has had some success in its bid to foment a rewilding of the Crown

Estates. The Duchies, having resisted its reasonable ask, might experience some guerrilla rewilding.

In the workplace, if change is resisted, then there may be occasion for climate strikes. And if businesses seeking policy change meet resistance from government, then they may consider previously unused tactics such as withholding a percentage of owed tax.

Imitation and translation

Those seeking to organise needn't necessarily reinvent the wheel and have much to learn from imitating and modifying approaches that have seen success elsewhere. Extant Transformative Adaptation endeavours in [Nepal](#) or [Rojava](#); remarkable *non-profits* such as [Bosch](#); the resilience of Cuba from 1991 [under incredible 'peak oil' pressure](#); the outstanding carbon reduction achievements of Denmark (made possible in part by wide community 'buy-in' to renewable energy, as well as by policy-innovations in this field and others at the state level); the outrider success of countries such as Bhutan and [New Zealand](#) on moving beyond obsession with economic growth, are just a few examples.

Another necessary strategy is to popularise good practices that have hitherto stayed within the progressive bubble. For example the Transition Town movement has done great things in dozens of countries, but mostly it succeeds in towns with large progressive populations. Work to address eco-anxiety, or reconnect with nature demonstrates similar patterns. All of these ideas can in principle appeal to many parts of the population but in practice any membership organisation acquires a culture that reflects the background of its membership. Therefore a lot of existing progressive initiatives need help translating their many learnings to allow their uptake by new populations.

Climate Majority Project Incubator

Much of our energy is concentrated on a CMP Incubator that helps provide funding and expertise to people who are acting on good new ideas to get climate action into the mainstream. The incubator gathers funding from concerned "investors" and supports social entrepreneurs with financial, strategic, psychological and networking input. We are working with partners to help expand the services we can assist nascent climate majority groups with, including a social media and web presence, tech advice, legal

advice, and so on.⁵

The idea is taken from business, where incubators provide expertise and skills that all new businesses need. At the moment we consider Climate Majority work similar to the early days of online business, when a number of good new ideas had been advanced to a great stage of readiness and simply needed funding from a first-wave of incubators/investors to become viable. As internet retail drew attention and the money drawn towards online business increased, the next wave of incubators became more full-service affairs that started to help entrepreneurs at earlier and earlier stages of development. Typically this was done by drawing in people who had acted as CEO in the first wave of business. Analogously, we are funding individuals and small groups (some of them already quite experienced in business or campaigning) who can act as advisors to the next wave of climate majority enterprises, who we expect will be supported by a growing wave of willing funders.

Strand 4: Building Shared Understanding

Finally, the emerging climate majority requires a process for making wider sense of the world and informing collective action; for deepening the kinds of “big picture” considerations outlined in the pages above. As mentioned we dispute the possibility of up-front, comprehensive plans for building mainstream serious climate action. Instead we believe that **a credible and democratic process for shared understanding must patiently be built with allies from across the political spectrum. Such a process must both name long-term ambitious goals and continually plan a series of next steps on the journey towards those goals.**

This process will bring diverse groups aligned with CMP together in an embodiment of intelligent democracy. Importantly it can **give many people a chance to see their actions as part of a larger whole potent enough to matter.**

An effort for transition that creates such a sense of shared endeavour, will emerge from a community that shares deep intentions and is constantly growing and diversifying while deepening bonds of trust and solidarity. We can more easily trust people, communities and processes to guide us than we can trust plans for transition created by people we do not know through a process we aren't part of. So if a small group of planners were to create a plan with sufficient detail to actually be a blueprint for transition, they would have little success convincing the population of that plan's merits. For comparison, remember the scientific community's difficulty in convincing people of

the depth of threat posed by climate breakdown. Planning to build trust is then the paramount challenge of planning.

Trust can be built by working together, and our first three strands of action provide the conditions that will allow more people work together as part of a credible transition process. At the moment it is impossible to have a sufficiently democratic conversation about systems change because awareness of the depth of transition necessary is still concentrated among a narrow set of people. There can be no motivation if we don't know what is at stake and if a unifying conversation isn't happening. But the goals of truthfulness in communicating our predicament (strand 1), increased emotional support (strand 2), and finding actions that can appeal to, and usefully absorb the energies of, the broadest segments of climate-concerned citizens (strand 3), allow community to form around urgent climate action. Within these communities of trust and collaboration, the conversation can deepen among people who feel part of something.

Key Challenges and Formative Principles of the Shared Understanding Process

As mentioned the process of developing shared understanding involves deciding on next steps while keeping in mind and preparing for key long term challenges. Here we briefly lay out some key near term sense-making challenges facing the Climate Majority and a set principles which will inform our long-term process for building shared understanding.

Key near-term challenges:

Making the Climate Majority aware of itself

A foundational sense-making task, and luckily one of the easier ones, is **to help people become aware of the emergence and growth of the Climate Majority itself**. For people thinking of organising in their community, workplace, extended family or faith group, it is vitally helpful to see that others near and far are doing the same: waking up, organising, looking for the others. **The more that people are aware of same kind of thing happening across many domains, the greater encouragement they feel, and the greater their willingness to put effort into an endeavour big enough that it *just might work*.**

To consider the emotional importance of this task, consider the following example: Imagine a young person tells her friends and family that she wants to work to respond to climate decline. Her family's responses may often land somewhere somewhere between playful teasing and mockery - "*So, you want to save the world?*". If the same

person said “I want to organise the world’s information”, then the response might be similar, but *if she says the same thing after being hired by Google, then the reactions change*. Their family might approve or disapprove but they would have no grounds on which to mock. Yet, despite the fact that there are many more people devoting their lives to addressing climate chaos than there are working for Google, this large movement does not (yet) lend credibility to the efforts of any one person in the way that Google as a corporation does to its employees, in coordinating their efforts well.

The emergence of a climate majority must and can, therefore be aided by awareness of itself. If people see their contribution as part of a far larger, transformative wave the sense of isolation that contributes to inaction is reduced. Further, willingness to be part of mainstream action is helped when we see that its emergence is inevitable. This movement’s greatest recruiter, after all, is the weather, which will become more convincing every year.

Successful outreach across demographics

A crucial aspect of building shared understanding concerns learning how to spread climate awareness among different segments of the population. In our funded audience research work, advised by George Marshall (founder of ‘Climate Outreach’) and building on ‘Britain Talks Climate’, we are exploring this task. Books have been written on this subject, but in this short document, we will focus on just a few key points. First of all the segment of the population that researchers call Progressive Activists - highly-educated, mostly urban people who think globally and who identify with political issues such as inequality and injustice — has traditionally dominated climate action; but a climate *majority* can only be convened by listening to other concerned segments and addressing their specific concerns. Many people think in more local terms than progressives, and are more interested in practical than abstract concerns.

For example, as mentioned in strand 3, talking about adaptation is helpful for reaching people who think locally. Though carbon levels in the atmosphere are a global phenomenon, their effects are local. Preparing for the effects of climate chaos is far more practical on a local than a global level, and so adaptation is arguably a very effective way of broaching the subject of climate to localists, who make up most of the electorate. It is impossible to prepare for local effects caused by climate without gaining climate awareness. This will in turn translate to a willingness to reduce emissions (as well as direct impact). Progressive activists who think in terms of global responsibility may consider such an adaptation strategy unsatisfactory. We believe that building a climate majority means being ready for people to show up just as they are and journey together to a destination as yet unknown. Insistence that everybody goes straight to the

(idealised) end of the journey leaves many unwilling to get on board. Thus the present state of the climate movement; ghetto-ised, and still small compared to the epochal scale of the issue.

Among segments of the population who are openly patriotic and conservative, motivating ideas include e.g. *defending what we hold dear* and *showing leadership*⁶. Climate change is a threat to the national interest, and offering patriotic audiences an opportunity to help to defend their country from the effects of climate breakdown can be more appealing to them than advocating altruism on behalf of the most affected countries. While most people have elements of both of these concerns, self-interested impulses are less publicly expressed. It will be a great boost to global climate action if a country like the UK starts moving towards net zero ambitiously, wherever the motivation comes from. Likewise the chance to show some genuine world leadership on climate and biodiversity/conservation has potential appeal with conservatives. In the absence of adequate multilateral efforts the world may benefit from a country willing to go it alone to some extent on climate, so Britain's independent and even patriotic streak has potential advantages.

Navigating divisive questions

A number of questions can cause division among people who see the need for climate action. We do not have to come to final answers but polarising questions must be identified and given thought early and often. For example, if we ignore questions such as the priority of green growth or loss and damage early they will be more divisive later on.

Formative principles:

Reducing net carbon emissions to near zero, is necessary and is only likely to come about as part of a deep effort for systems change. What exactly this systems change looks like, and what other long-term goals must necessarily accompany zero emissions, will become clearer gradually, and patience is needed for this consensus to form and broaden.

Carbon neutrality cannot be achieved while leaving rest of our system intact, because our system is itself unsustainable in various ways. Biodiversity is an obvious example: simply replacing fossil-fuel technology with green technology will not stop the ongoing extinctions of hundred of thousands of species, and as our best

⁶ See Climate Outreach's seminal work *Britain Talks Climate*:
<https://climateoutreach.org/reports/britain-talks-climate/>

scientists have been warning us we humans will directly feel the effects of our assaults on the web of life soon (see David Attenborough's Wild Isles). As the physicist Tom Murphy says, "if squirrels could speak, they'd be rooting for us to fail to transition to green energy, because humans' access to massive amounts of energy has always been used to destroy and exploit natural systems".

Climate action must explore synergy with wider systems change on many levels

Many aspects of human systems invite change: our basic priorities, political polarisation, market-centric ideology, wise use of technology/AI, colonialism, corporate unaccountability, and more. Climate breakdown can be seen as one potentially fatal symptom of deeply unhealthy habits of our economic and political systems, which are out of touch with the needs of thriving life. Though we see the need for system change, we focus on the climate and ecological crisis because, at least for the people of the UK, *climate is the clearest and most widely agreed threat to its own existence that our broken system has created. Our system's failure to address climate chaos can more clearly demonstrate the brokenness of our system for more people than any other social issue.*

Shared understanding will build solidarity with the rest of the world.

The nature of climate as a universal systemic issue entails that acting out of self-interest can become an accessible *route* to global solidarity. Radical climate activism often prescribes a stance of global justice and solidarity which, while admirable, can have the effect of alienating segments of the population whose concerns rest closer to home. Even when they become engaged out of localised concerns however, citizens of the global north will soon see that humanity's prevailing economic systems threaten life on earth and that we have potential allies far and wide who face the similar threats. Once we better understand how broken systems created the common threat of climate breakdown, we will more easily understand, and sympathise with, the wider implications of those systems for other people in other places, who are exposed to the most brutal aspects of world economic systems. Therefore, climate is a great place to start in an effort towards systems change – though not the only place to start and not the place to stop.

Pragmatism, not defeatism or utopianism, on Climate Justice

The Climate Justice conversation, for all of its admirable intent, risks becoming Utopian in character, seeking a way to right all of the world's wrongs in record time, to arrive at total global justice. Certainly this would be desirable, but the job of the pragmatist is to practise the art of the *possible*. Finding the best course possible means not letting go of ideals, but seeing them as a compass in a political landscape filled with hills, gaps, and

seas. We seek others who want to practise the art of possible, and favour a political identity built around deeply concerned pragmatism - and around a shared *process*, a lived 'thrutopia'⁷ or 'protopia'⁸ - rather than any fixed ideology.

We're Over (Material) Growth

Prioritising growth in material wealth gave our ancestors longer lives and access to many pleasures that were previously undreamed of, but we've long since passed the point where national pursuit of growth is creating greater happiness for most people in the UK. Growth in fairness, in the health of natural environments, community and free time are all more effective means to better lives than growth in money. Fixation on economic growth is "so last century": it's time to move on to more important things. We see a need for a massive increase in creative experimentation and imagination with new ways of incentivising economic behaviour that creates real value.

Four strands weaving

We offer a succinct summary of our four strands, and their essential interrelationship to form a rope strong enough for our purpose.

- 1 Narrative shift toward truthfulness
- 2 Cultures of Awareness and Resilience
- 3 Tangible Action
- 4 Building shared understanding

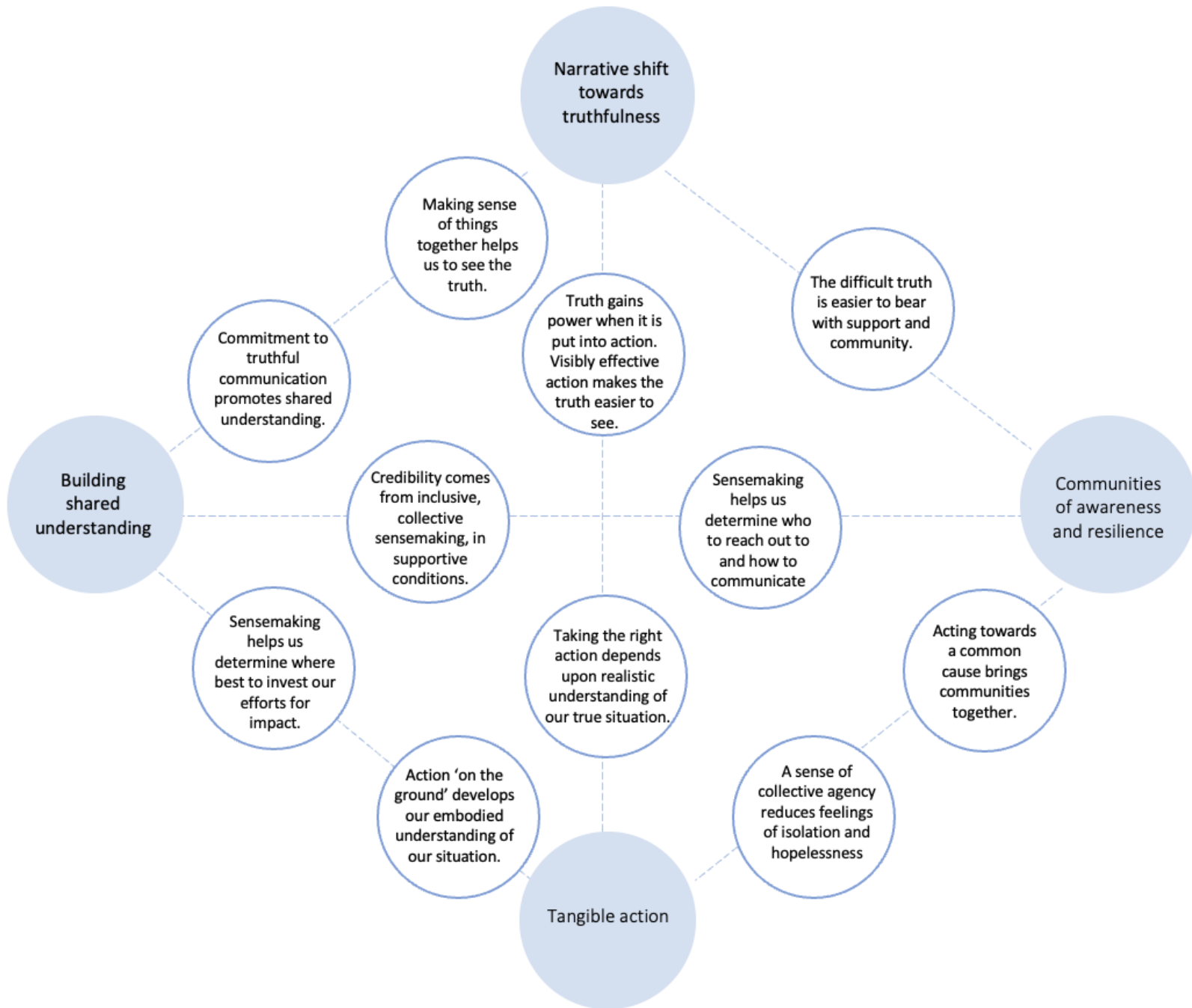
In short, (1) Facing the truth can motivate (3) action, and is a condition for the right *kind* of action. Action in turn lends power to truth and grows the constituency for mutual support. (2) Cultures of awareness, resilience and mutual support help us hear, accept and *cope* with the truth. They nourishes, incubate and empower our actions and eases our process of shared understanding. (4) Making sense of things together gives us the clarity we need to understand and speak the truth, choose wise actions and identify our networks of mutual support.

All four strands are all essential, reinforce one another, and in fact cannot entirely be

⁷ See: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ruPERT-read/thrutopia-why-neither-dys_b_18372090.html

⁸ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/14/special-series/protopia-movement.html>

distinguished from one another. It is their profound interaction that generates potential transformative scalability. Millions can be moved into hope and faith by the energising effect of remaining aware of the trouble, of finding meaningful routes to action, and of feeling a part of an emerging historical movement (a climate majority).



Conclusion

In closing, we remind the reader that the power of authentic emotional response to our unprecedented plight, power demonstrated by Greta and XR, has only just begun to show itself. The determination of *most of humanity* in the face of its greatest crisis, waits to be unleashed. And sure as climate is the determining issue of our times, the wave is coming. Every felt experience of climate disruption brings the moment closer. Sooner or later, a majority climate movement is an inevitability.

We'd like it to be sooner. So we propose to act as a catalyst – for a mass, distributed, anti-polarising majority to continue emerging, finding each other, and finding the work that is theirs to do. While this work is meaningful to its participants and purposeful in and of itself, its aggregate aim is to expedite system change, of the sort that can allow us to hope for a new, human, ecological civilisation.

This Theory of Change does not pretend to set out a complete path towards such possibilities; as we've discussed, the most that is possible is a provocation to begin the work required – and perhaps the intimation of ways of being that are required to support and nourish our doing. Making real a serious majority for climate action is a manifold task requiring the particular knowledge, agency, needs and desires of those in its diverse constituencies. Of utmost importance will be the trusted messengers and entrepreneurs who can see ways to organise channels for the agency of others, appropriate to people and place.

Looking back at this time, we and our children will one day ask, *did we act seriously, skilfully, selflessly, when there was time to make a meaningful difference?*

It's still an open question. Let's make sure we succeed in answering in the affirmative.

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