

Humanist Climate Action

JULY 2023 NEWSLETTER



Welcome to this July newsletter, in which we reflect on the Humanists UK Convention in Liverpool, and offer suggestions for more actions you can take.

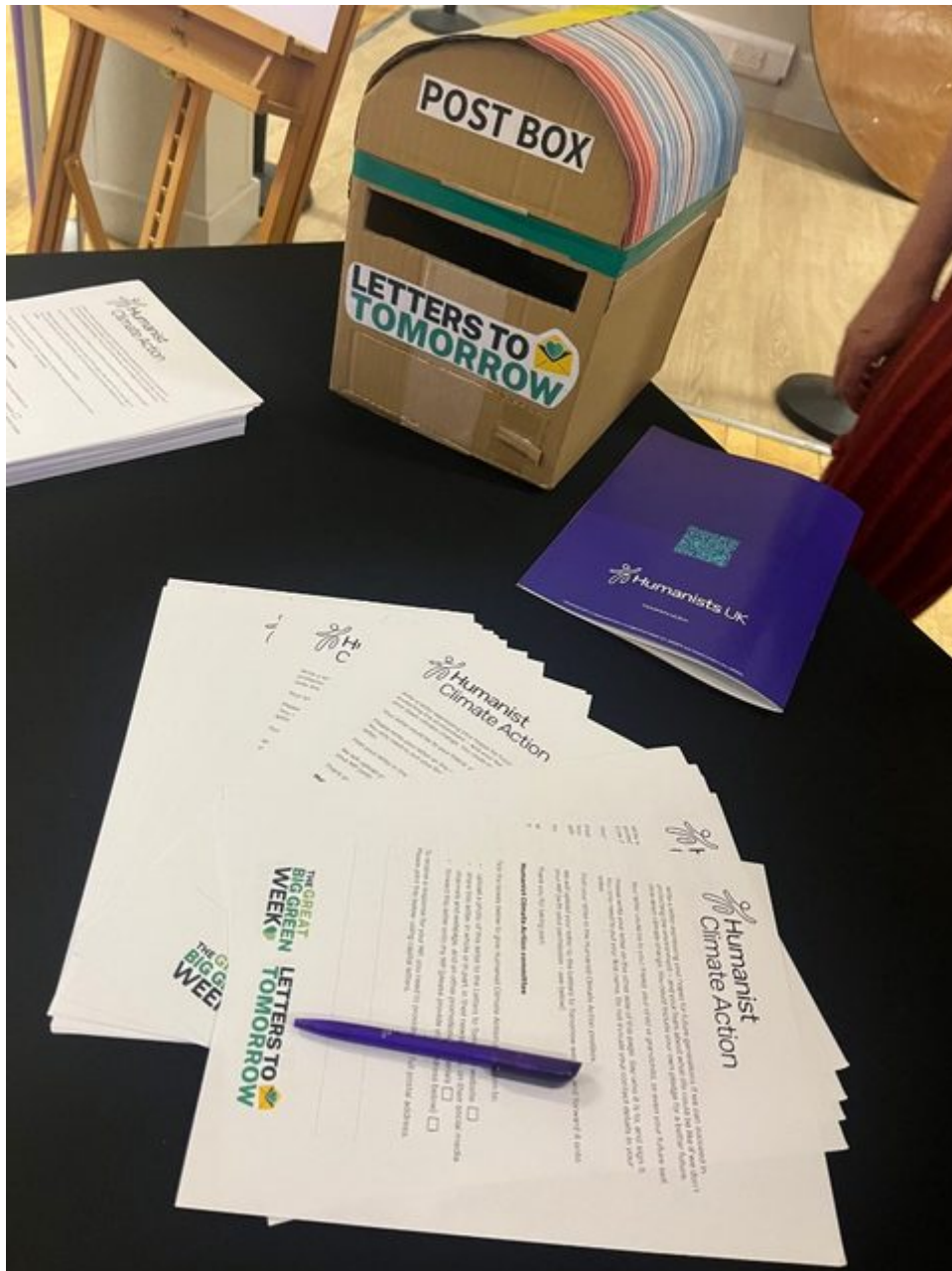
GOOD TO MEET YOU



We hope everyone had a great time at the Humanists UK Convention 2023. It was fantastic to speak to so many humanists who share a concern for the natural world over the course of the weekend – thank you to everyone who dropped by our HCA stall. Zion Lights (interviewed below) gave everyone a lot of food for thought with her engaging talk on the future of the

energy system (thank you Zion!) and we had many thoughtful letters to the [Letters to Tomorrow](#) campaign. The most mentioned topics in the letters we gathered were changing how we live, concerns that we are too late, and fears for nature. We hope that the process of writing the letters inspires some people to take some small actions (it is never too late!). Finally, I would just like to highlight and thank members for the [endorsement of Humanist Climate Action](#) and the commitment to ensuring a humanist voice is heard in climate activism, through the AGM motion and also Humanists UK's continuing support.

Lori Marriott, Humanist Climate Action Coordinator



This is the text of the motion passed at the Humanists UK AGM in Liverpool:

Humanists UK is to be congratulated for setting up Humanist Climate Action as one of its sections, and for the progress HCA has made so far. HCA should continue to follow the policy of Humanists International, of which Humanists UK is a member, to 'foster a social and political commitment to urgent action and long-term policymaking to mitigate and prevent climate change'.

In addition, Humanists UK should adopt the following:

- Humanists UK should add a fourth tenet to the three tenets of humanism as displayed on its website. The fourth tenet should read that Humanism recognises that humans are part of the natural world and totally dependent upon it, and therefore should protect and nurture it.
- Humanists UK should encourage humanists to make their voices heard about the climate crisis and other threats to wildlife, individually or as part of international or local campaigns, organisations or movements, or by actively supporting Humanist Climate Action.
- Humanists UK should encourage humanists to adapt their lifestyles to reflect the need to lower carbon emissions and protect the natural world.

The meeting voted to remit additional clauses calling on Humanists UK to make guidance on environmental action prominent and frequent in its communications, and to take environmental impacts into account in all of its future policies and campaigns. They were remitted because of the need for detailed decisions about what 'prominent and frequent' and 'all its future policies and campaigns' would mean in practice.

INTERVIEW WITH A HUMANIST

Zion Lights spoke at the Humanists UK Convention on the topic 'What do we misunderstand about energy?' Lori asked her about her take on humanist environmentalism.



Tell us a bit about yourself.

I'm a Science Communicator (MSc) with a long history of environmental advocacy. I founded the evidence-based climate activism group [Emergency Reactor](#) because I wanted to create a space for people like me in the environmental movement. All of the green groups I've historically been involved with rely on unscientific ideology as their foundation, which then forms the basis of their campaigning. With ER we only campaign on issues supporting the scientific consensus.

I used to be the Editor of *The Hourglass*, Extinction Rebellion's print newspaper, and I was also a spokesperson for the group. I am also the author of *The Ultimate Guide to Green Parenting*, the first book of its kind at the time to look at evidence-based ways to raise children with a low carbon footprint.

I am now a sought-after speaker on clean energy, and I also give lectures on methods of science communication, tackling misinformation, and effective climate action around the world.

How did you come to be interested in environmental concerns?

I've always cared about the health of the planet and all of the life on it, from a very young age. Learning about global warming as a child terrified me, and took me on a journey into environmental activism, involving everything from organising events to taking direct action to authoring a book. My views in the environmental movement have evolved over time and unlike many traditional environmentalists I do not think that humans are bad, but that we've made mistakes that we can rectify, and that it is possible for us to live in harmony with the world around us.

What's your biggest environmental concern?

Climate change. Of course there are many unknowns with climate change, and much debate about where it will take us, but essentially I don't think we should risk potentially destroying the

only known habitable planet in the universe. For me, other environmental issues pale in comparison.

What one thing would you encourage people to do to live a greener lifestyle?

Campaign for evidence-based climate action. Call out misinformation. Communicate with journalists and politicians so that they understand the issues we face and how best to tackle them. You can do this by e.g. writing in to your local paper to take a stand, and emailing your local MP.

There are many viable solutions that can get us out of the mess we've made, but if campaigning is based on feelings and conjecture instead of science, fighting for those solutions can do more harm than good. We've already seen this happen with people protesting genetically modified organisms, nuclear energy, and other discoveries and technologies that can save lives. We don't have time to keep making the same mistakes.

Subscribe to my Substack: <https://zionlights.substack.com>

TAKING LOCAL ACTION

In the May newsletter we suggested looking for ways in which Humanist Climate Action supporters can take action at the local level. Here is another idea for something effective to do in your own locality.

Council Climate Action Scorecards



Analysis by Climate Emergency UK in January 2021 showed that of the 409 local authorities across the UK, 84 did not have climate action plans. While we know the UK Government clearly needs to step up its act, councils also have an important role to play. Local authorities can help influence up to 30% of the cuts in carbon emissions needed to get to net zero locally, and we all need to see this happen.

In 2021 Climate Emergency UK therefore produced its Council Climate Plan Scorecards and assessed councils' climate plans according to 28 questions. Each council was marked against these criteria and given a right to reply before the scores underwent a final audit. The analysis revealed significant regional variations, with the average score for Scottish authorities 50%, compared with 46% for England and 45% for Wales. Only four of Northern Ireland's 11 councils had a climate action plan at all, with all four scoring 31% or lower. Following its launch, the appetite for this tool amongst residents and councils was immediately apparent, and campaigners from all over the UK have used the Scorecard to push councils to improve their Climate Action Plans. We encourage you to [find the results for your own Council](#).

We all know that actions speak louder than words, so the next stage has been assessing councils on the actual climate action they are taking. This follow-up project used Council Climate Action Scorecards for the first ever assessment of the climate action being taken by local authorities in the UK. The project scored all UK councils on their climate action against 89 questions in 7 different sections. Councils were then offered the right of reply, enabling them to respond to their mark, and this stage closed on 15 May. The results of the project will be published in autumn 2023.

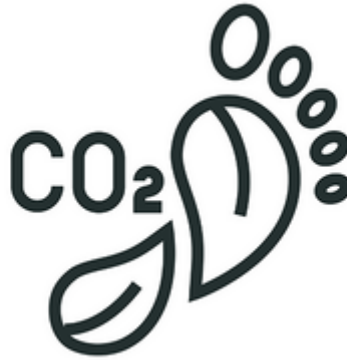
We know that councils are crucial in creating the low-emission future we need. We also know that it's hard for outside observers to understand what councils are doing to reduce emissions. Scorecards will give local communities the power to shape, prepare and create low-emission futures, as we need to tackle the global climate emergency together. The scorecards will demonstrate and celebrate where councils are doing so by acting locally to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across their whole area. Three years after most councils declared climate emergencies, they must continue to think globally, by tackling the climate crisis, but act local, by creating the low-emission communities we need to thrive.

The Council Climate Action Scorecards will demonstrate which councils are striving to do this, as well as some of the most effective actions councils can take. The scorecard will give communities the opportunity to use this information to question and challenge their political representatives at the local level, when it is published in autumn 2023. You will be able to see the real state of climate action from UK councils and you will be able to ask your local representative if they really care about the health of your community and its future.

Please look out for the results when they are published in the autumn, and check to see how your own council is doing. In a future newsletter we will offer some advice on how to hold your own council to account.

Geoff Sallis

ARE YOU LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE AFFLUENT?



I expect most humanists would agree that there is too much inequality in the UK, and on a global scale huge injustice in the distribution of wealth. What may be less obvious is how that inequality feeds into an individual's impact on the climate crisis, amplifying that injustice.

The truth is, if you can afford a large house it needs maintaining, furnishing, and heating. It is convenient to have multiple cars and you can afford it, so why not? Holidays could involve second homes or long haul flights – and why have one when you can afford many? You get the picture. You may be well on the path to living more sustainably, but for those that are not I urge you to consider doing so.

Using the rather addictive online tool '[Place-Based Carbon Calculator](#)' I have found a couple of examples to illustrate the inequality of consumption in the UK and its climate impact.

- In England the average Kg Co2 per head is 8,500 p.a. The UK goal is that by 2032 this will be just under 3,000 Kg Co2.
- In Vintry, a very affluent ward in the City of London, the average Kg Co2 produced per head is 18100 p.a., while the average for the Local Authority is 12,600.
- In Eltham West, a deprived ward in Greenwich, the average Kg Co2 produced per person p.a. is 2,510, while the average for the Local Authority is 8,400.

This includes energy costs, cars, flights and consumption of goods and services, so the deprived community in Eltham is already meeting the 2032 goal. One can only assume that this is because they are too frightened to put their heating on and too poor to buy anything beyond the essentials.

As a comparison the wealthiest 0.1% of the world's population is estimated to emit a mind boggling 200,000 Kg Co2 per person p.a.!

I am not going to suggest that comfortably off individuals turn their heating off and eat less. What I am going to ask is that you consider your consumption and understand your carbon footprint. If you consume a lot and have financial resources, then reducing this is pretty easy. If you are in a large house make sure it is properly insulated. When your gas boiler needs

replacing, install a heat pump. Have multiple thermostats so you heat only the rooms you are in. Put solar panels on your roof. If you are having work done on your house, seek advice as to how to future-proof the property from an environmental perspective. Question whether replacing the car is necessary. Look at different holiday locations or different ways to travel or even fewer holidays. Eat a more plant-based diet. **Value for money means something different when you include in the calculation the desire for your children and grandchildren to have a habitable planet.**

I believe that those with the means have a particular responsibility to recognise that their choices have a disproportionate impact for good or ill on the future of the planet. As humanists, even more than others, that responsibility should spur us to do better year on year. When I see floods, fires, and famine I connect my previous and current consumption with these events. Making year on year changes becomes a virtuous habit and is surprisingly satisfying.

I thoroughly recommend readers to use the [Place-Based Carbon Calculator](#) to look at their own area and compare their own consumption to those around them. For those seeking to consume more ethically then I suggest a subscription to the *Ethical Consumer* which provides excellent research on companies and products.

Pauline Element

A REQUEST FOR HELP

We have been asked by researchers at the University of Padua and the University of Edinburgh to pass on a request for help with their research project. It will look at non-religious parenting and its challenges and achievements in making children aware of environmental values. They are looking for humanist parents with at least one child aged 6-18, young humanists aged 18-24 who were raised by at least one humanist parent, and also humanist grandparents of at least one child, to do an interview on Zoom which takes about an hour. If you think you can help, please contact Dr Hamide Elif Üzümcü at hamideelif.uzumcu@unipd.it or Dr Morena Tartari at Morena.Tartari@unipd.it.

KEEP IN TOUCH

We welcome feedback and responses to items in HCA newsletters. You can contact us at climateaction@humanists.uk. All newsletters to date can be found on [the Humanist Climate Action section of the Humanists UK website](#).