

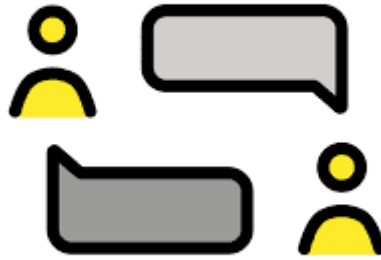


JANUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER



Happy New Year! And if it's not too late for New Year Resolutions, we'd like to make some suggestions for speaking up in 2026 – talking to climate change deniers, getting active in local Humanist groups, lobbying MPs, and engaging in conversations.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS



How can we best talk to climate change deniers? In the [November newsletter](#) we asked readers to share their thoughts on this, in view of the worrying increase in such denial. We were pleased to get some thoughtful responses. The basic advice is that it depends who it is that you're talking to. If it's someone with a scientific background, presenting the evidence may be the right way to go, but with someone else, bombarding them with the facts may simply come across as a patronising put-down, and a more personal approach may be more appropriate.

It also depends on what it is that they're denying. As Stephen Robinson helpfully spelled out, if you can talk to someone over a period of time, the conversation may go through stages. At first, they may refuse to accept that global warming is happening at all, but on this the evidence is overwhelming. They may then move to the claim that, though it's happening, it's part of a natural cycle, and it can be pointed out to them that such cycles take thousands of years, in contrast to the alarmingly short time-scale over which the current changes have been happening. Once they accept that climate change has human causes, they may shift to the view that we in the UK should not have to take action in view of the financial consequences of Net Zero policies. 'I point out', says Stephen, 'the benefits of us leading change, but most of all I talk about our children and grandchildren.'

The same suggestion was made by another reader who said, 'Probably one of the most direct ways would be to confront them with "What will you say to your children in ten years' time when there is absolutely no denying that climate change is happening?", and they ask "What did you do to try to curb global warming?" Will your answer be "Sorry, I was too selfish to believe it, as I wanted to continue with my lifestyle and to hell with the future"?''

He added that people may refuse to take action themselves because they think it's the government's job to do so. Perhaps they have a point, he says, 'perhaps the government should put it across more strongly that flying is one of the worst causes of climate change, together with gas-guzzling vehicles.'

Getting the balance right between lifestyle changes and political action is something we try to address in these newsletters. Obviously if you fly less, for instance, your action will by itself make only a miniscule difference. But it may make other people stop and think. It may motivate them to recognise the need for political action, and it may help to send the message to governments that they have to step up, and in turn to get tough with the big corporations which are the real drivers of climate change.

What other ways are there to induce, in those who are reluctant to do anything, a greater sense of urgency? Hugo Kerr, who runs MP Watch Witney, said that one of their strategies is to pivot the discussion towards the need for adaptation and climate resilience. This, he said, 'makes it more local, more real and more alarming'.

This is a theme we hope to return to in future newsletters. The increasing incidence of flooding, for instance, is making people's properties uninsurable, bringing home in stark terms the reality of climate change and the reality of its consequences. More on this in due course. In the meantime, please share further thoughts and suggestions.

COP30 – GLASS HALF FULL OR GLASS HALF EMPTY?



When we sent our November newsletter, COP30 was still in progress at Belém in Brazil. Now that we can take stock, what do we think of the outcomes?

These annual 'Conferences of the Parties' are unwieldy mechanisms for achieving anything. Bringing together representatives of (nearly) every country is bound to make agreement almost impossible, and the obscurity of the diplomatic language makes it difficult to tell what was actually agreed. This COP was true to form, disappointing as always, but perhaps not a total failure. And any assessment of what it achieved is likely to be a succession of 'BUT's.

COP28 in Dubai in 2023 had at last produced a commitment to 'transition away from fossil fuels', and it had been hoped that Belém would build on this and agree a roadmap for that

transition. It then looked as though nothing would be said about this in the final text. BUT at the last minute a deal was done to include the oblique wording that the Conference 'reaffirmed the UAE consensus'.

The Conference did agree to create a Just Transition Mechanism, the Belém Action Mechanism, something which civil society groups and movements in the Global South had strongly pushed for, recognising that the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy must uphold human rights including workers' rights and the rights of indigenous peoples and marginalised communities. The UK, after dragging its feet, eventually agreed to back this. BUT there was no commitment on who will fund it.

Another ambition for COP30 had been an effective agreement to halt deforestation – an ambition symbolised by the fact that the Conference was taking place in Belém at the mouth of the Amazon and the gateway to the rainforest. The final text failed to agree a roadmap for progress on halting deforestation. A positive achievement was the launching of a Tropical Forests Forever Fund, a new investment mechanism channeling voluntary contributions into the protection of forests worldwide. The UK helped to design and support this. BUT it has declined to commit any public money to it.

Perhaps the main value of these events is that they keep the global conversation going, essential if there is to be international cooperation on tackling climate change. The headline absentee was of course the US government, in line with Trump's denunciation of climate action as a 'scam' and a 'hoax'. (The only other non-attenders were Afghanistan, Myanmar and San Marino.) The US administration has subsequently made it clear in other ways that it rejects the very idea of a rules-based international order, and that its foreign policy is beholden to the oil companies as its domestic agenda is. BUT the absence of Trump's administration from COP30 was probably just as well – it would no doubt have been a hugely disruptive influence – and the US was represented by numerous state governors, city mayors, members of Congress, and activists, a reminder of the vital importance of action at sub-national level.

So what are we left with as the verdict on COP30? As always, the outcome is a glass half empty – BUT perhaps also a glass half full.

Richard Norman

USING THE ACTIVISM TOOLKIT



In the November newsletter we introduced [Module 1 of our new Climate Activism Toolkit](#). Later in the month we gave Module 2 a trial run at a meeting of Oxford Humanists. Here's how it went.

Despite the wet and windy November weather, with cancelled trains making travel difficult, there was a full house at Oxford's Community Works centre, with people keen to discuss how humanist values can translate into practical climate action. This was the setting for our November event, *Humanist Activism in Local Groups and Practical Steps for Climate Action*, led by two members of the Humanist Climate Action Committee, Clare James and Christian Jensen.

The evening was about inspiration, collaboration, and piloting Module 2 of the new Climate Activism Toolkit, a practical resource designed to help humanist groups take meaningful steps for the planet.

As humanists, we care about evidence, ethics, and the well-being of people and the planet. The climate emergency threatens the future we want, one built on reason, fairness, and shared prosperity. Taking action is about living our values. Whether it's protecting communities from extreme weather, safeguarding nature, or ensuring a sustainable world for all, climate action is a natural extension of humanist principles.

Christian opened the evening with a dynamic account of how Central London Humanists have turned talk into impact. From rallies to outreach campaigns, their activism, often in partnership with groups like the Association of Black Humanists and LGBT Humanists, shows what's possible when we work together. His enthusiasm was infectious, and it was clear why Oxford Humanists were so engaged. Christian reminded us that 'Activism isn't just for campaigners, it's for anyone who wants to make a difference.'

Clare followed with a focus on outreach and co-creation. She shared how humanist groups can build relationships with local grassroots organisations, not just as spectators, but as active participants. 'We don't just attend meetings, we are the meeting,' she said, urging the

audience to take ownership. The toolkit, she explained, will help groups do just that: to plan, prioritise, and amplify voices in their communities.

Module 2 of the toolkit will be a guide and a call to action. It will provide step-by-step support for groups to:

- Identify local priorities and align them with humanist values.
- Build partnerships with diverse organisations to strengthen impact.
- Mobilise members with clear, achievable actions.
- Measure progress and celebrate successes.

Oxford Humanists received the summary of the toolkit warmly, with questions, ideas and a collective commitment to move from discussion to doing.

Module 1 of the toolkit is [already available online](#), and we're inviting groups to use it. Module 2 will be available soon. Whether you're just starting out or looking to deepen your impact, this resource is for you. If you don't want to wait for Module 2 and need help getting started, contact clare.james@humanists.uk for support.

As Christian put it: 'The best time to act was years ago. The second-best time is now.' Let's make humanism a force for good, together.

Since then, we've had this encouraging update from Oxford: 'At Oxford Humanists we have committed to adding Humanist Climate Action as one of our key initiatives going forward. We had three climate related events last year: a talk from Lori Marriott in April on Humanism and the Climate Crisis, a stall at the Oxford Green Fayre, and the workshop on Humanist Activism. Our plan is to engage further with existing Climate and Environmental groups to complement their focussed approaches with our broader stance to, amongst other things, challenge disinformation, science denial and conspiracy-mongering.'

INTERVIEW WITH A HUMANIST



Pictured: Dr Helen Czerski. Picture credit: Emma Gibson

Dr Helen Czerski is a Patron of Humanist UK, Professor of the Environment and Society at University College London, and a scientist who specialises in the physics of the oceans. At the Humanists UK Convention 2025 she gave a fascinating talk on [How the ocean shapes our world, based on her book Blue Machine](#), which we reviewed in the [November newsletter](#).

Helen, tell us a bit about yourself – how long have you been a humanist?

I grew up in a non-religious household, so religion has never been a part of my life (apart from having to sit through occasional prayers at school). My Mum was a member of the British Humanist Association, as it was back then, and I remember seeing BHA leaflets

around the house. I don't remember much specific discussion of 'humanism' as a concept, but living a meaningful and empathetic life by taking responsibility for your own actions was there in the background all along. So I've always been a humanist.

How did you come to be interested in environmental concerns?

Some of it comes from my Mum (she has a lot to answer for!). She was a member of the local Friends of the Earth group when I was a child, and she participated in their campaign work. So I grew up with a background awareness that our planet is something to protect. My secondary school let me have a noticeboard that I covered with green paper and notices about conservation volunteer work and local environmental campaigns, and I was the student environment officer for two years at university. So it's always been there. While studying physics, I was interested in how the world works, and an important part of that was how the planet works, but no-one showed me the links. Eventually (and it didn't happen until I was about 26 or 27) the physics and the planet came together and that became my career.

How do your humanist values lead you to want to take environmental action?

I think that each of us has three life support systems: our own body, planet Earth and the infrastructure of our civilisation. If we care about people, we need all of those three systems to work well. Our planet is a beautiful and complex system, and it supports us in all sorts of ways that we take for granted. I think that the great challenge of our time is to understand how that planetary life support system works, and then learn to work with it rather than against it. The first stage in that is appreciating what it means to be a citizen of planet Earth, and being part of this huge system rather than separate from it. But if you care about people, you have to care about the planet.

Do you think it is important for Humanist Climate Action to exist as a part of Humanists UK?

I think that 'climate action' is just another way to say 'we want our beautiful complex planet to continue to be a good place to live, and to continue to be both beautiful and complex'. So much climate damage comes from assuming that Earth is simple, that it is easy to control and that it will bend to our will. Standing up against those simplifying assumptions is fundamentally a humanist thing to do.

What's your biggest environmental concern?

It's all the same thing. There isn't one 'big' thing because they're all interlinked.

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

To normalise the conversation about the impact of the things we do, and to make it clear to politicians, business leaders and any other decision-makers that we care about this stuff, and we're prepared to change our voting/buying/supporting habits to make it clear that we want to live in a more sustainable system. Oh, and stop eating meat (or significantly reduce the amount you eat), especially beef. The land that would free up for forests, nature, energy generation etc is incredible.

SHOUT LOUDER!



This month [an article in The Guardian](#) really caught my attention. The article covered new research showing that MPs underestimate public support for green policies. This in turn made them less willing to vote for or speak up in favour of environmental action.

A survey was carried out with 100 current UK MPs from across the political spectrum. The MPs were asked in early 2025 to estimate the level of public support for green policies and their answers were compared with an Ipsos poll of the public that asked the same questions. The MPs' estimates were consistently lower than the public.

While 76% of the public back Government support to make homes more energy efficient, MPs estimated this would be 68.1%. Other questions covered a frequent flier tax (Public 62%/MP estimate 46.7%), product taxes to reflect environmental impact (Public 56%/MP estimate 41.4%). So while the majority of the public supported all of the above, MPs believed that only one had majority support.

The survey found that MPs were disproportionately exposed to those who were opposed to environmental action. Lisa-Maria Tanase, the Cambridge academic who led the research, says that she thinks there is 'a rightwing bias where voices of the conservative-leaning members of the public tend to be overrepresented, for a range of systemic reasons. They

tend to be more privileged, educated and politically engaged segments of society'. Anti-climate disinformation from lobby groups also contributes. In interviews with former UK MPs they reported that one of the key barriers to them implementing stronger climate action is that in their opinion the public are not ready.

My conclusion from this is clear. We have been too quiet and those concerned about the climate crisis need to work much harder to make themselves heard by those holding political office or seeking election.

It is obvious that those opposed to any action are normally those more vocal and visible. If as an individual you support an action you are less likely to write, demonstrate or engage on social media.

Humanists have a long history of lobbying for change. It is time for us to stand up and lobby more actively for faster progress on the climate and to make sure our representatives hear our voice loud and clear.

Pauline Element

And as well as 'shouting' (or [writing to your MP!](#)), how about a New Year's Resolution to have more conversations about humanist climate action?

ONE SMALL THING

I know it's cheeky to start the new year by asking you to do something for us, but as I'm sure you are aware, HCA is always looking for ways to increase its impact. To this end we would like to encourage readers to use the articles in the newsletter to engage in conversations with friends, colleagues and family. While climate change denial is a huge problem, apathy is equally important and easier to counter during normal day-to-day interactions.

As well as conversations you can also send either an entire newsletter or particular articles to someone you think may be interested. Targeting what you share to meet the recipient's interests is always most likely to get the best response. For those of you active on social media please feel free to share information you think appropriate. The link at the end of the newsletter gives access to previous editions.

It costs nothing to engage with those around you and let them know that you believe the climate crisis is important and urgent.

YOUR FEEDBACK

We welcome feedback and responses to HCA newsletters. We aim to exemplify the humanist commitment to rational discussion and debate. You can contact us at climateaction@humanists.uk. All newsletters to date can be found on the [Humanist Climate Action website](#). We aim to produce a newsletter every two months.

As always, all signed contributions to the newsletter represent simply the views of the individual writers and are not necessarily endorsed by either Humanist Climate Action or Humanists UK.