



Building Local Alliances

Aim

Our aim is to build a mass movement from below which forces governments to invest in jobs and renewable energy and combat climate change. Despite all the good work and the activities that have taken place in local areas, environmental and climate groups can be isolated and inward, and it is certainly true that we need to win over a lot more people.

The Alliance for Jobs and Climate is keen for people and organisations who share this commitment to come together and harness energies, to act as a broad networking and campaigning organisation within which there will be a wide variety of views and beliefs. We don't want to duplicate existing organisations or the work they are doing, but to act as a broad climate network.

Diversity

Up and down the country people are uniting over climate related issues. The capacity to pull in a variety of people from a range of organisations has been a key to successful events, such as the lobbies of MPs over the Energy Bill, and meetings around Zero Carbon Britain 2030 or a Million Climate Jobs.

Thus, for example, in Derby an ad hoc coalition was set up in order to organise around 'the wave' demonstration (organised by Stop Climate Chaos during the Copenhagen talks in 2009). In Oxford there was a successful meeting around a Million Climate Jobs in 2011, successful because it was able to involve people from different backgrounds and a number of different organisations. However, the problem with ad hoc networks is that they tend to do little more than swap news and go no further in terms of developing a strategy for systematically raising the Climate issue.

Setting up networks and alliances

In a number of towns and cities, such as Sheffield, and Derby, healthy and sustainable ¹ alliances have emerged. Though they have emerged in different ways and use different names, they generally have common features serving as guiding principles. This briefing sheet draws upon these experiences and the Alliance for Jobs and Climate website contains a number of case studies

Public meetings

It is useful to have regular public meetings, and to hold periodic joint meetings with other related organisations. It is important that ideas are shared and debated publicly. We will build the climate movement most effectively by challenging and sharpening our own ideas.

Tip: It may be appropriate to launch the alliance at public meetings around a topic such as Zero Carbon Britain 2030. The million climate jobs report has, in conjunction with the million climate jobs caravan which took place in June 2012, generated a lot of interest and some sizeable meetings throughout the UK. ²

Public meetings are a useful means for organisations within the alliance to promote their activities but be careful they do not become bogged down by 'business'.

Nor should people at meetings be harangued by 'life style' arguments, such as the food they are eating or the transport they are using. As David Mackay says: 'every little bit helps but only a little bit'. ³

The emphasis of these meetings should be upon strategy and building a broader movement.

¹ Touch wood.

² See the Million Climate Jobs pamphlet: <http://www.campaigncc.org/greenjobs#pamphlet>

³ Refer to 'Sustainable energy- without the hot air.'

Build a bridge with Trade Unions

We will not win without the support of working people and it remains that the trade union sector should play an important part in the climate movement.

Contact can be made with trade unionists, particularly with the local Trades Council, to see what they can do, both in workplaces and unions.

Building the collective

In order to build and sustain a local Alliance for Jobs and Climate group there needs to be more than just a handful of 'activists' to prevent those involved from exhausting themselves. After the initial launch meeting, a collective management group or steering group must be created. This should be as open as possible. The need is for a simple, practical and flexible organisation, with a division of labour and trust. Everyone is answerable to the collective.

Task-allocation often works best by harnessing people's expertise, and not by cajoling them, even if it means that some things may not be done, such as having a designed e-newsletter.

A bank account will need to be set up, and banks normally require a constitution. The Alliance for Jobs and Climate can supply some templates.

Eggs or baskets?

The alliance, network or coalition should not become completely locked into specific campaigns, such as objecting to the opening of a new Tesco's group, or opposing the building of a bio-fuel plant, or promoting a wind farm.

It is not that these things are unimportant but previous experience suggests local networks have often floundered, and activists have been burnt out when all their eggs have been put in one basket.

Furthermore, there is a distinction to be made between being an alliance instead of another organisation. The alliance should not duplicate existing organisations or the work they are doing, but must act as a broad jobs and climate network, recognising the roles that partner organisations play within, and recognising that some members may also be members of Transition Towns, the RSPB, a local trade union branch, and so on.

Links with Local Government

Communicate to the local council that the Alliance exists as a group which represents other organisations and individuals, and is part of a national network. Get to know the elected council members who have a climate brief and invite them to explain to the group the council's position. Use any appropriate opportunities to push climate issues up the agenda.

If the council has signed up, for example to 10 by 10, ask them to explain what progress has been made (one method to do this is by submitting a written question to the council meeting). Be ready to highlight the gap between talking about targets and actually meeting targets.

Politics

While recognising many people will be disillusioned with the conventional political process and with existing political parties the Alliance for Jobs and Climate is NOT apolitical. What we are setting out to achieve is independent of parties but is profoundly political. (Discussions about setting up charities tend to be counter-productive.) The group should be inclusive, therefore welcoming both people with no political affiliations alongside political activists. Local groups need to harness ALL available resources and energies in order to be effective.

National Affiliations

Local organisations and activities will be strengthened by being part of larger organisations, such as Stop Climate Chaos and the Alliance for Jobs and Climate. Benefits include: contact with like minded organisations, a channel for publicising local events, greater leverage locally, and the opportunity to join national initiatives.

The Alliance for Jobs and Climate stresses, in particular, the need to reach beyond the traditional climate activists, and for us to engage with a broader movement.

Conversely, national organisations cannot sustain themselves merely by decreeing actions from above. Instead, there's a need for a base, along with an opportunity to represent and lead local organisations. This can only happen if they are sensitive to the diversity, needs, and mass of local organisations.