

York Quakers meet the challenges of sustainability
A Report by the Sustainability Group

Activism on sustainability issues is alive and well among F/friends in York AM, but dilemmas, large and small, are everywhere, every day, for all of us.

Campaigning

Here are just some of the actions, campaigns and concerns that F/friends are engaged in:

- Active involvement in the Green Party, Extinction Rebellion, Zero Carbon Harrogate, including a Carbon Conversations course at Harrogate FMH, and more.
- Signing petitions, lobbying politicians, writing to the press, networking on an amazing array of concerns:
 - government action to support and incentivise sustainable transport;
 - legislation against single-use plastics;
 - improvement in recycling facilities;
 - tax on fast fashion;
 - introducing a bottle deposit scheme;
 - stopping subsidies for fossil fuel use;
 - population control ... and more.
- Aligning charitable giving with political priorities and environmental concerns, by supporting:
Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Practical Action, Shared Interest, Thrive Renewables, RSPB, Woodland Trust, Trees for Life, Resurgence Trust, Client Earth, Centre for Alternative Technology.
- Aligning investment decisions (and divestment decisions) similarly, by:
 - supporting an organic shop,
 - saving in Ecology Building Society and Triodos,
 - crowdfunding through platforms that invest in renewables, community-based energy projects and eco-housing,
 - divesting in organisations damaging the environment such as BP.
- Promoting interest in sustainability issues at work by showing Documentary 2040 to colleagues.
- Promoting interest in sustainability issues in the community by organising a painting exhibition and donating the proceeds to an environmental organisation.

- Using purchasing power to support sustainability priorities, such as buying organic food to reduce pesticide use and searching out products without palm oil.
- When fed up with lobbying politicians with no result, taking personal direct action by picking up rubbish in the local neighbourhood.

Dilemmas

The lack of options for living sustainably, that are available to us and affordable, results in a bewildering range of everyday dilemmas. Here are some of them, macro and micro, that F/friends shared:

- Cutting car use is difficult in areas with poor public transport, but moving house may not be an option.
- Electric or hybrid cars may be less polluting than petrol or diesel, but these are an expensive option. An added dilemma is that the battery requires cobalt, linked with child labour in the Democratic Republic of Congo mining industry.
- Sustainably produced food and household products may be more costly and not affordable on a tight budget.
- Home heating systems may be inefficient or use fossil fuels, but relatively new and costly or difficult to replace.
- Cutting down on flying reduces carbon emissions, but family and friends live in places accessible only with long-haul flights.
- Cutting down on flying for work has a cost in long journeys or missing events and networking.
- Trying to make sustainable choices makes shopping stressful.
- Finding compostable dustbin bags is not easy.

Thoughts

And here are some thoughts from F/friends on the actions and dilemmas they face:

- Given the range of issues to consider in trying to live sustainably, knowing what to focus on is a dilemma in itself. Reducing consumption, switching to renewables, political campaigning, micro-actions locally, the list of options is long.
- A feeling of inadequacy, knowing the damage to the environment that our lifestyles cause, is shared by many.
- The lack of success for politicians supporting green policies and sustainable investment can add a sense of defeat for some.

- Car-free living is possible for some people, who are able to live near public transport, walk and cycle. Indeed some families in York AM have been car-free for decades and have passed this lifestyle on to their grown-up children and their families.
- Living free of air travel is possible for some people. Some in York AM have adopted a different approach to work and leisure journeys throughout their lives.
- Local small-scale actions not only make a difference locally but remind people that small actions by small groups of people can change the world.



In F/friends' own words:

'Being in a rural area and being old it is difficult to give up car because of isolation.'

'There is a dilemma with electric cars in that lithium is needed for the batteries.'

'Government should increase taxes on fuel for airlines in line with other petrol taxes.'

'Been lifelong members of Green Party (previously Ecology Party), demonstrated against Nuclear Power and Nuclear Weapons and been involved in the politics of population control.'