



Community engagement for net zero governance: Stakeholder workshop

Blackfriars Priory, Gloucester, 26 November 2025

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1. Introduction

The [Rural Climathon Toolkit](#) was formally launched at Blackfriars Priory, Gloucester, during a one-day event that brought together researchers, rural policy leads, local government officers, and community practitioners from across Gloucestershire and the wider region. The launch coincided with the British Academy's presentation of their recent report, [Governance to Accelerate Net Zero](#), creating a productive space to connect local, place-based community action with broader governance challenges.

Held on a bright November morning, the event featured an overview of the Rural Climathon approach and the development of the Toolkit. Drawing on four years of collaborative work running Rural Climathons across England, a team from the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at the University of Gloucestershire have developed a practical, accessible guide for rural communities and local authorities wishing to design and deliver participatory climate-action events. The Rural Climathon Toolkit's purpose is to support context-specific dialogue, foster social learning, and help communities articulate priorities and co-produce climate solutions.

The launch event introduced this resource to a wide audience of practitioners and stakeholders who are engaged with rural climate action. Alongside this, the British Academy presented their analysis of governance accelerators for net zero, situating the Toolkit within a wider conversation about institutional enablement, public engagement, and the multi-scalar nature of decarbonisation. Throughout the day, participants explored the interplay between national governance, county-level strategy, and very local activities in rural communities, culminating in an interactive zine-making workshop to reflect on what community engagement for net zero governance looks like in practice.

This report summarises the structure of the day, the contributions from speakers, and the key themes and insights that emerged from discussions and activities.



Figure 1: Blackfriars Priory in Gloucester

2. Morning Session: Setting the Scene

2.1 Welcome and Opening Remarks

The event was opened by Professor Damian Maye (CCRI, University of Gloucestershire), who outlined the aims of the day and the motivations behind the Rural Climathon Toolkit. He reflected on the evolution of the Climathon method since 2021 and the lessons learned from working with rural communities on food, land use, energy, and transport challenges. The Toolkit, he explained, distils these experiences into a format that communities can adapt to their own needs, supporting deliberative, locally driven climate action. Working with mid-level actors (namely local authorities) has been integral to the success of the Rural Climathon approach to date. The talk closed by suggesting actors at this 'meso scale' are critical to net zero delivery.

2.2 Governance to Accelerate Net Zero

Henry Richards (The British Academy) introduced [*Governance to Accelerate Net Zero*](#), summarising the report's core 'governance accelerators' (Figure 2). These are aimed at policy and political leaders at all levels of UK governance.



Figure 2: The eight governance accelerators for net zero identified in the report (The British Academy, 2025)

Henry emphasised that while ambitious national targets exist, delivery ultimately depends on how governance frameworks enable (or constrain) local actors. The Rural Climathon approach was highlighted as a promising example of structured community engagement aligned with these accelerators.

2.3 The Rural Climathon Toolkit

Damian Maye returned to outline the Toolkit itself. Developed from multiple Rural Climathons across England, it captures best practice in outreach, event design, facilitation, and evaluation. Key components include:

- Step-by-step guidance for planning and delivery.
- Templates for stakeholder mapping, agenda design, and action recording.
- Advice on trust-building and pre-event engagement.



Figure 3: Poster advertising the Rural Climathon Toolkit

- Emphasis on participatory methods and inclusive dialogue.
- Suggested follow-up approaches to support momentum beyond the event.

The Toolkit is freely available at ccri.ac.uk/rural-climathon/, and the CCRI team are happy to answer queries from groups wishing to implement it; please email ruralclimathon@glos.ac.uk with any questions.

2.4 Local Government Perspectives

Local partners who have worked with the CCRI to deliver Rural Climathons around Gloucestershire provided reflections on how participatory approaches like these fit within county and district climate strategies.

- **David Sharman (Gloucestershire County Council)** spoke from the perspective of Climate Leadership Gloucestershire. He described the importance of embedding community engagement within county-level planning, especially in the context of expected local government reorganisation in Gloucestershire. He stressed the need to keep climate issues prioritised through any structural changes and to ensure that the voices of rural communities remain central. David shared examples of ongoing, collaborative work with partners across Gloucestershire to ensure this is the case, such as the creation of a countywide climate risk and vulnerability assessment and ongoing work to support farmers and food growers to create sustainable food systems.
- **Simon Richards (Forest of Dean District Council)** discussed how Climathon-derived ideas have helped accelerate existing workstreams. Examples included progress on the electric car club, on-demand transport initiatives, and community-driven food and farming projects. Rather than producing entirely new outputs, Simon described Climathons as catalytic: surfacing ideas, building relationships, and helping to move projects forward.



Figure 4: Simon Richards speaking on local government perspectives

2.5 Discussion Session

A structured discussion followed, facilitated by Katie Clubb (Forest of Dean District Council). Topics included:

- How to effectively evaluate participatory events and track the impacts of community-generated ideas.
- Ways to ensure continuity after short-term funding cycles.
- Integrating community-level insights into county-wide or regional strategies.

Participants shared experiences from across the county, emphasising the importance of feedback loops: reporting back to communities on progress and ensuring that local expertise influences policymaking.

3. Lunch and Net-Walk

Lunch was provided by Poco Culina (Cheltenham), followed by a “net-walk” around Gloucester Docks led by Katie Clubb. Participants paired up to talk about their work, swapping partners every few minutes. This format encouraged informal networking while offering a chance to refresh after the information-heavy morning session. The walk helped build new connections across sectors and made space for reflection before the interactive afternoon activities.



Figure 5: Group photo from the net-walk

4. Afternoon Session: Community Insights and Zine-Making Workshop

4.1 Community Vignettes

The afternoon incorporated short presentations from local community projects working on land use, food, energy, and transport (see agenda). These contributions provided grounded examples of community-led climate action, energising discussions ahead of the workshop.

First up were George Maslin (Stroud District Council), and Piers Cardiff and Becky Moorcroft (Forest of Dean Climate Action Partnership, FODCAP). George spoke about natural flood management initiatives in the Stroud area, highlighting how upstream solutions can ameliorate flooding in urban areas, as well as improving carbon sequestration in woodland and soil. Piers and Becky presented a community assembly organised by the Forest Food Forum with support from FODCAP. This initiative enabled grassroots ideas and solutions to be developed, as well as feeding into the Food and Land Use Climathon co-organised by the CCRI and Forest of Dean District Council in February 2025.

4.2 Zine-Making Workshop (Part 1)

The zine workshop was facilitated by Philippa Simmonds (CCRI, University of Gloucestershire). Participants were shown some examples of existing zines (pronounces “zeen”), and presented with large sheets of card, magazines (including an inevitable stack of *Farmers Weekly* from the CCRI office) and craft materials. They were invited to work in small groups at their tables to explore the following guiding question:

How can decision-makers best engage and support rural communities in their net zero journey; in ways that:

- *build understanding,*
- *tackle misconceptions, and*
- *increase buy-in for climate action?*

Participants quickly grasped the activity, discussing ideas while cutting and arranging images and developing visual narratives. The tactile, creative format encouraged collaborative thinking and surfaced insights that might not have emerged in a conventional discussion. The process also enabled participants to quickly craft a narrative and formulate positive visions for the future as well as acknowledging current fears.



Figure 6: Community zine making workshop

4.3 Further Vignettes and Workshop (Part 2)

After a quick break for coffee and cake, two more community presentations followed. Helen Jeffrey from Forest Community Energy shared how this new initiative is supporting community energy projects in the Forest of Dean, such as the installation of solar panels and energy storage at a community space that serves a variety of different groups. She also brought some innovative comms materials, including the beer mats you can see being incorporated into the zine in Figure 6. Meanwhile, Hannah McDonnell, Faatimah Bham and Madison Moon from Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership highlighted the work they are doing to engage with underserved groups to identify their mobility needs and help make rail travel more inclusive and accessible.

Inspired by this second set of presentations, some groups continued to finesse their zine page, while others started a new sheet focused on rural transport. By the end of the day, the room displayed an impressive collection of A1 zine pages incorporating illustration, written reflections, found images and texts, and even some 3D components! The resulting zine reflects diverse perspectives on rural climate action, community engagement, and governance challenges.



Figure 7: Zine making workshop part 2

5. Major Themes Emerging from the Day

Across talks, discussions, and the creative workshop, the following cross-cutting themes emerged.

5.1 Focusing on Benefits, Not Just Co-Benefits

Participants emphasised the importance of centring practical, material improvements for rural residents. Rather than framing climate measures as secondary “co-benefits”, speakers argued for highlighting the everyday value they bring; warmer homes, safer and more reliable transport, restored nature, and youth mobility. These resonate strongly amid the cost-of-living crisis.

5.2 Nature as a Core Concern

Nature restoration repeatedly surfaced as a central priority. Participants noted strong public support for nature-positive initiatives, which often align with climate goals. This reinforces the need to foreground nature recovery within rural climate engagement.

5.3 Safety and Accessibility in Transport

Safety, especially for young people and those who identify as women, emerged as an influential factor in transport choices. Improving perceptions of safety is crucial for changing behaviour.

5.4 Listening First

Discussion highlighted that rural communities’ needs and priorities differ from urban contexts. Effective communication must start with listening: understanding local values, concerns, and challenges before designing engagement activities.

5.5 Language, Communication and Messaging

Participants explored ways to communicate climate issues in accessible, relatable, localised ways. Avoiding jargon, abstract language or distant imagery (e.g., polar bears), and emphasising place-based stories was seen as essential. Addressing misunderstandings through clear visuals, memorable narratives, and real-world examples was a recurring theme.

5.6 Funding and Capacity

The conversation touched on the need to make funding opportunities more visible and accessible. Capacity constraints, financial, organisational, and time-based, are significant barriers for rural communities seeking to initiate climate action.



Figure 8: Presentation from Forest of Dean Climate Action Partnership

5.7 Reaching Underserved Communities

There was a strong desire to broaden participation beyond the “usual suspects”, ensuring harder-to-reach or marginalised groups are actively included in decision-making processes.

5.8 Building Trust

Trust emerged as a cornerstone of community engagement. This aligns with the Rural Climathon Toolkit’s emphasis on sustained pre-event engagement and relationship building, which is essential for successful deliberative processes.

5.9 Celebrating Successes

Participants highlighted the importance of recognising and celebrating successes, however small. Positive framing helps maintain momentum and encourages wider participation.

5.10 Partnership working

The value of partnerships was both implicit and explicit in the workshop. We heard from initiatives such as Forest of Dean Climate Action Partnership and Climate Leadership Gloucestershire, and we heard how the Rural Climathon Toolkit would not have been possible without partnership between the university and local authorities. This way of working can help to bridge siloes, avoid duplication, and deliver innovative solutions.

6. Reflections and Next Steps

Overall, the event provided a rich exploration of place-based climate action and the governance contexts in which it unfolds. Bringing together national-level insights from the British Academy with county and district perspectives, alongside a creative community activity, allowed participants to reflect across multiple scales, from decarbonisation targets to the everyday realities of rural life.

Looking ahead, the hope is that:

- Communities and organisations will make use of the Rural Climathon Toolkit to develop their own climate-action events.
- The Toolkit becomes a catalyst for new partnerships, local experiments, and deeper engagement across Gloucestershire and beyond.
- Lessons from the launch continue to inform county-level strategies during a period of local government change.
- The CCRI team can answer enquiries from interested groups as they begin to implement the Toolkit.

The event demonstrated strong appetite for participatory, community-centred approaches to climate governance and highlighted the many ways in which rural communities are ready to contribute to a just and effective transition to net zero. It will be important to continue feeding insights from these discussions into other national initiatives including the UKERC Public Engagement Observatory, the Royal Academy of Engineering Energy Futures programme, and central government initiatives such as the Government Office for Science [principles for navigating the social aspects of grid transformation](#) and the recently published [‘Energising Britain’ plan](#) for public participation in the clean energy mission.



Figure 9: Members of the organising team from CCRI and FoDDC

Appendix

Community Engagement for Net Zero Governance: Agenda

26th November 2025, Blackfriars Priory, Ladybellegate St, Gloucester GL1 2HN

10:00-10:15	Registration and refreshments	
10:15-10:30	Welcome / aims of the day	Damian Maye, University of Gloucestershire
10:30-10:50	Governance to accelerate net zero	Henry Richards, The British Academy
10:50-11:15	Rural Climathon toolkit: supporting local community deliberation and climate action	Damian Maye, University of Gloucestershire
11:15-11:35	Local government perspectives and actions on net zero governance	David Sharman, Gloucestershire County Council; Simon Richards, Forest of Dean District Council
11:35-12:10	Discussion	Katie Clubb, Forest of Dean District Council, facilitates
12:10-12:20	NICRE community engagement film	UoG introduce
12:20-13:40	<i>Lunch, followed by 'net-walk'</i>	Led by Katie Clubb
13:40-14:00	Community vignettes 1 & 2: Land Use and Food and Farming	George Maslin, Stroud District Council; Piers Cardiff and Becky Moorcroft, FoD Climate Action Partnership
14:00-14:35	Community zine workshop, Part 1	Philippa Simmonds, University of Gloucestershire, facilitates
14:35-14:45	<i>Comfort break / coffee</i>	
14:45-15:05	Community vignettes 3 & 4: Energy and Transport	Helen Jeffrey, Forest Community Energy; Hannah McDonnell, Community Rail Partnership
15:05-15:45	Community zine workshop, Part 2	Aimee Morse, University of Gloucestershire, facilitates
15:45-16:00	Wrap up and close	Damian Maye, University of Gloucestershire