



# Climate Conversation Stage 1 – Report of Consultation

## Introduction

Between 8 March and 2 May 2021, Stage 1 of East Dunbartonshire Council's 'Climate Conversation' was conducted by the Council's Sustainability Policy and Land Planning Policy Teams in order to seek local public opinion and the views of Council employees on climate change and related issues, to inform the emerging Climate Action Plan ('CAP').

The purpose of this report is to provide a high-level account of the outcomes of this exercise, as a precursor to the more in-depth analysis that will be carried out later in the CAP preparation process. While some of the points raised during the Climate Conversation have already been responded to, further consideration, including via internal consultation, will be necessary in order to determine how the various comments, questions and suggestions raised by participants should be responded to via the CAP and other related documents.

A full set of the data captured through the surveys is provided in Appendix 1A.

## Methodology

The Climate Conversation involved two formal methods for capturing views: online surveys and online events.

- Four surveys were developed, each tailored for the four main interest groups identified by the Sustainability Policy Team: local individuals (adults) (the 'general' survey), local young people, local businesses and East Dunbartonshire Council employees. Each survey contained questions across a number of themes covering key issues including general awareness, energy, consumption, transport, biodiversity and food.
- Four online events were held, in line with Covid restrictions, where the themes covered in the surveys were discussed in more detail, with presentations from Council officers being followed by question and answer sessions. Three of these events were aimed at adults and one was aimed at young people between 11 and 18. Participants were invited to submit views verbally and in writing; written comments were captured via the 'chat' function within the online platform and via the use of 'Padlets' (online pinboards), which were accessible during each event and for a period afterwards. The timings of the events were staggered throughout the day and evening to promote accessibility, and Microsoft Teams was chosen as a platform due to being widely used, user-friendly, compatible with the majority of devices which run Windows and also compatible with Apple and Android tablets and phones.

In addition to these formal mechanisms, people were invited to contact the Council's Sustainability Policy Team throughout the consultation period for informal discussion.

Various promotional measures were undertaken to raise awareness of these measures and to encourage engagement.

- In advance of the consultation launch, emails were sent to the following local groups: community councils; churches; businesses, via the East Dunbartonshire Economic Partnership (EDEP); parties with an interest in climate change generally or transport specifically; and a variety of community groups via East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action. This included communications specifically focused on the young people’s event, for which a dedicated digital flyer was created and shared on social media.
- Information about the launch was also shared with Council employees via a dedicated Employee News bulletin and an article in the Depute Chief Executives’ update.
- To support these targeted measures, two webpages were set up on the Council’s website, for public and Council staff respectively; these displayed a Climate Conversation brand which was created for ongoing use throughout the development of the CAP.
- After the launch of the Climate Conversation, ongoing promotion was carried out throughout the consultation period; social media posts of varying styles (including an animation) were shared at regular intervals, press releases were issued and reminders were sent to Council employees in follow-up bulletins. Follow-up communications were also sent to local businesses via EDEP - which included an invitation to respond in a less structured way - via Business Gateway and via direct emails to businesses on local industrial sites.
- In addition to Council-led promotion, a variety of local partners shared information, including: social media posts by Bearsden West Community Council, Carers Link East Dunbartonshire and the Dunbartonshire Chamber of Commerce; website promotion by Milngavie BID and Girlguiding Dunbartonshire; a feature in the Bearsden and Milngavie Community Magazine; and an article proactively published by the Kirkintilloch Herald.



EDC Facebook, 08.03.21



Kirkintilloch Herald, 17.03.21;  
Bearsden & Milngavie Herald,  
18.03.21



Bearsden and Milngavie Community Magazine, April 2021

Figure 1 – Examples of Media Coverage

## Participation

A total of 209 people participated in the Climate Conversation – 182 people completed surveys, 15 of whom are also understood to have participated in one of the events; a further 23 participated in the events, and a further four contacted the team for informal discussion.

While these figures have been carefully calculated to avoid double-counting of any participants, there is inherently some overlap between the two adult categories: 43% of the employee survey respondents are also East Dunbartonshire residents, and a small percentage of the general survey respondents are Council employees. Additionally, it is possible that different email addresses were used by the same person in different contexts, leading to double-counting.

## Findings

The survey, online events and email exchanges yielded both quantitative and qualitative results, which are reported below. In relation to survey questions, it should be noted that not all respondents answered every question. In a small minority of cases omissions were due to a technical issue at the start of the process affecting two questions, which was resolved after some surveys had already been completed. The survey responses discussed below therefore relate to the percentage of people who responded to the particular question, rather than the percentage of the overall number of respondents.

### Climate Change in General

Overall, survey participants showed a high level of apprehension around the issue of climate change. The most common terms used by general survey respondents were “worried” (16%), “concerned” (13%) and “anxious” (9%) when asked to provide a one-word description of their feelings. A combined 3% of respondents used positive language such as “proactive”, “hope”, “positive” and “optimistic”.

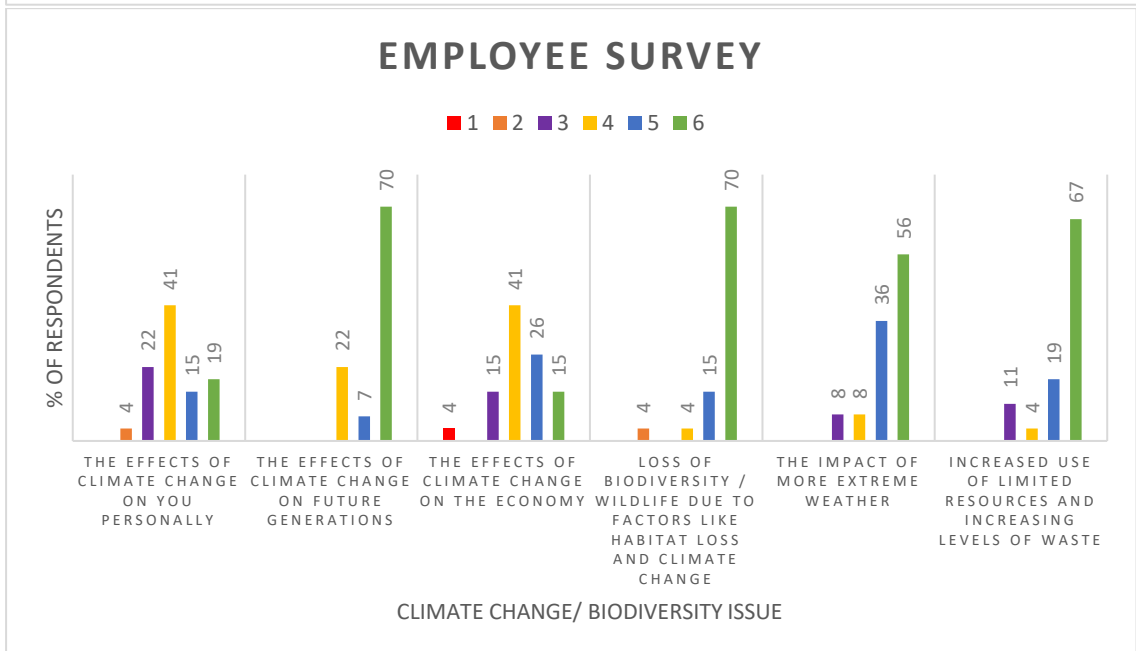
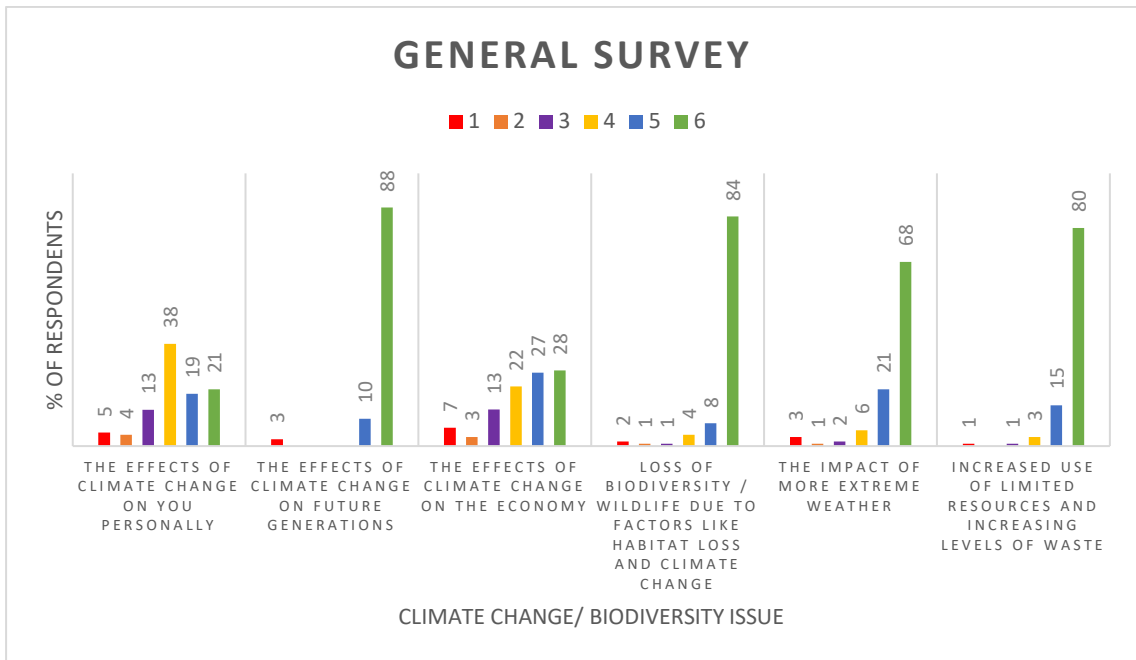


Figure 2: General survey respondents’ one-word feelings about climate change (the larger the word, the more frequently it was used)

However, optimism and ambition were also strong messages, including an expectation that the Council takes a bold leadership role.

Key findings are as follows:

- 94% of respondents to the general survey, 100% of Council employee respondents and 89% of business respondents consider that we are facing a climate emergency
- A clear majority of respondents to the general survey and employee survey were very concerned about: the effects of climate change on future generations (88% and 70%); loss of biodiversity and wildlife due to factors like habitat loss and climate change (84% and 70%); and increased use of limited resources and increasing levels of waste (80% and 67%). A majority of businesses were also very concerned about effects on future generations (89%) and increased use of limited resources and increasing levels of waste (67%).



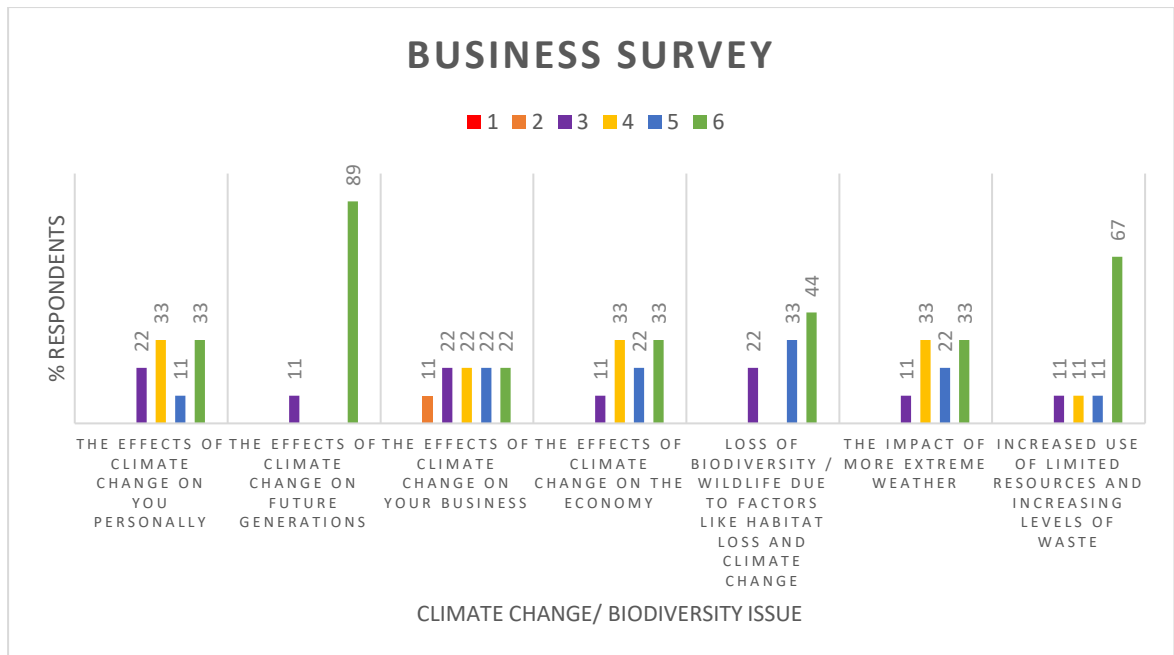


Figure 3: Levels of concern for climate change/biodiversity issues (1: not concerned – 6: very concerned)

- 72% of respondents to the general survey, 63% of employees, 48% of young people and 78% of businesses believe that the Council has a high responsibility in tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. Comments received during the online sessions echoed this.
- There is strong support for the idea of a local forum to steer future climate action. 93% of general survey respondents (109 people) would support the creation of a community forum, 64% of youth survey respondents (14 people) would support the creation of a youth forum and 8 businesses (89%) would support the creation of a business forum. Employees were also asked for their views on the creation of a community forum, with 91% (20 people) supporting the idea.

The perceived gravity of climate change and the demand for urgent action evident through the surveys, was echoed during the online events.

The majority of general survey respondents (59%) felt they had a good understanding ('5' or '6' on the scale below) of climate and biodiversity issues, while only a small minority felt that their understanding was poor.

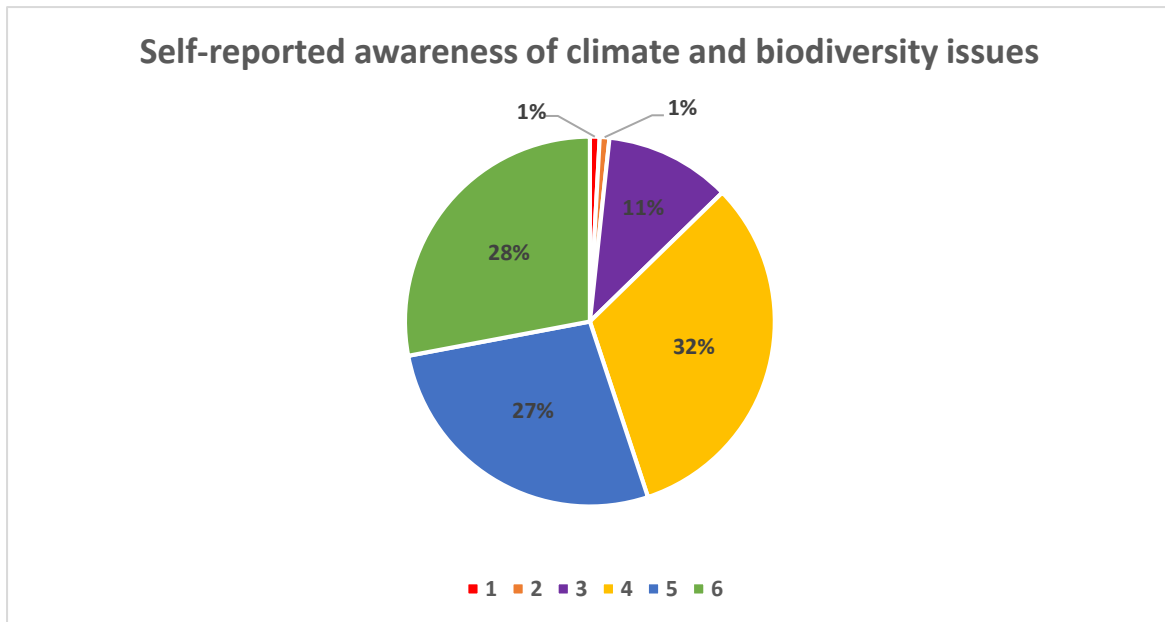


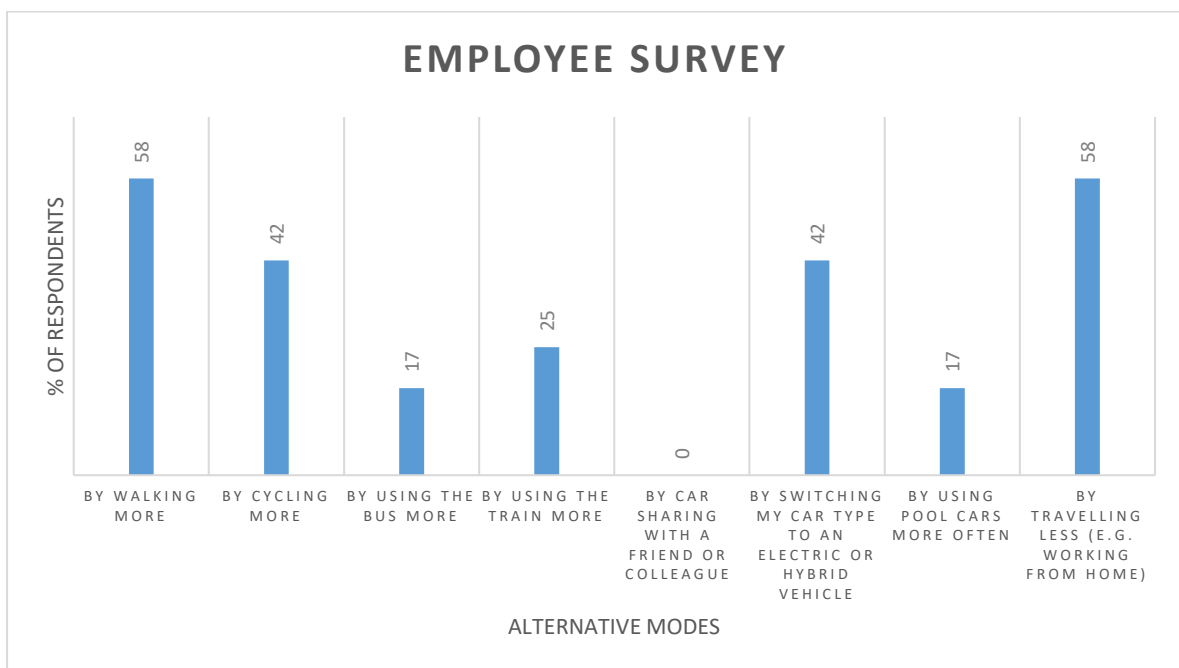
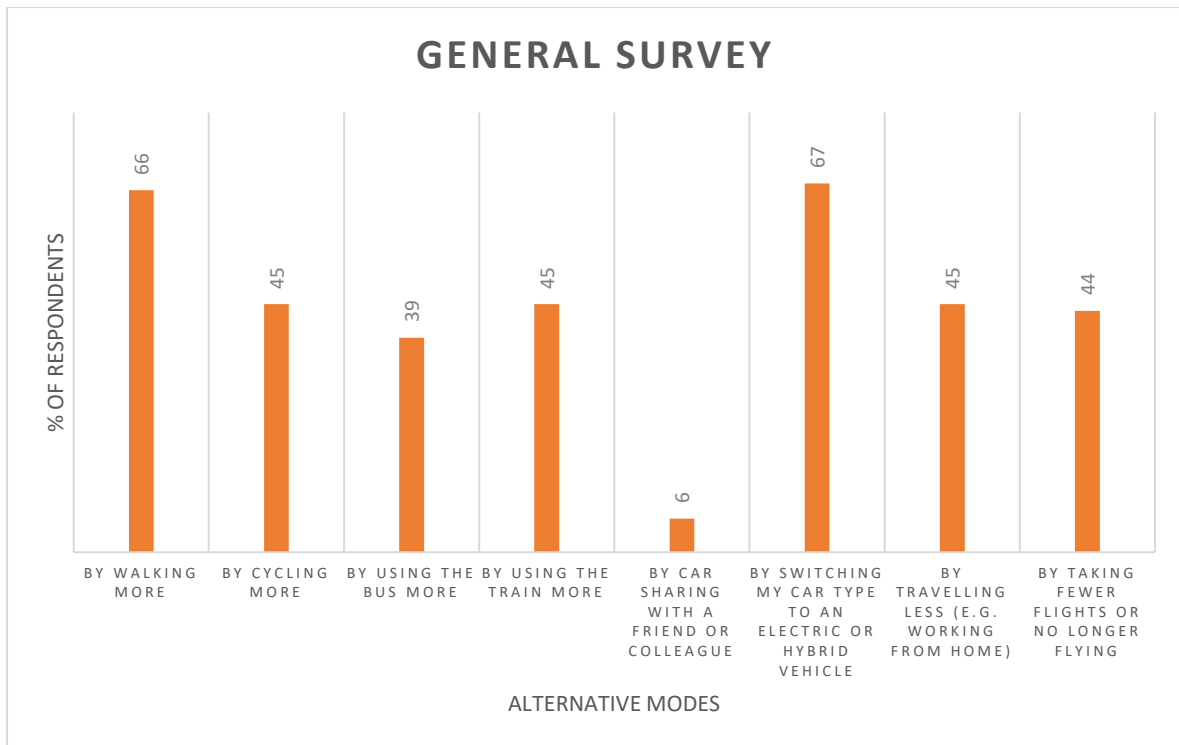
Figure 4: Self-reported understanding of climate/ecological emergency and its future effects (1: poor understanding - 6: good understanding)

The importance of adapting to the effects of climate change was also recognised by various participants who noted that changing weather patterns are already having local impacts and who proposed various adaptation solutions relating to the full range of themes discussed below, illustrating an appetite for joined-up solutions.

## Transport

Transport was the issue that generated the largest volume of feedback from Climate Conversation participants.

The survey results indicated that the private car continues to be a key mode of travel, with 100% of employees and 93% of general survey respondents stating that they have access to a vehicle. Furthermore, 42% of general survey respondents reported household ownership of more than one car. However, there is a strong appetite for change; 71% of general survey respondents, and 52% of employees, indicated they were very likely or likely to change their travel behaviours in the near future. The most popular alternative modes of travel for general survey respondents were switching to an electric/hybrid car (67%) and walking more (66%). The employee survey also indicated significant opportunity for change, particularly in relation to active travel; 52% of respondents reported that they were likely or very likely to change their travel behaviour, with 58% reporting that they would walk more and 42% reporting that they would cycle more. 42% also stated that they would switch to a hybrid/electric vehicle. 58% of employees indicated that they would like to travel less in the future (i.e. work from home more) to improve their travel behaviours.



*Figure 5: Preferences for alternative modes of travel*

Of the business respondents who used vehicles to deliver products or services to customers, 75% reported being very likely to consider switching to electric vehicles in the future.

The survey invited participants to suggest specific actions that the Council and public sector partners should consider to support sustainable travel. The predominant themes discussed were improved cycle access provision, an increase in electric vehicle charging provision, improvements to the public transport network and making areas pedestrian only.

The online events, which included opportunity for open-ended discussion, were dominated by questions and comments about transport and were followed by several email exchanges on the matter.

Active travel was of particular interest at each of the events, with various calls for increased commitment from the Council and investment in new infrastructure. Several participants questioned why the Council did not apply to the Scottish Government's Spaces for People fund during the earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for delivery of safer routes to schools was a recurring theme, including suggestions of closing roads near to schools at the start and end of the school day. There was concern from participants that the Council was falling behind in providing safe cycling infrastructure such as segregated cycleways across the local area and that this would be required in order to deliver modal shift and in particular participants requested more action and support from local Councillors in delivering more ambitious active travel infrastructure. It was requested that the Bears Way segregated cycleway was completed. Additional suggestions related to active travel included introducing low emission zones, improving pedestrian priority and safety at road crossings, refreshing road markings and having tougher restrictions in place for car parking.

Other modes of travel were also discussed during the events and in follow up feedback, including public transport, electric vehicles and parking. The quality and availability of public transport was criticised including a lack of bus routes across the area and improved rail infrastructure in the Bearsden and Milngavie area. In general it was requested that more electric vehicle charging points should be provided for public use. Parking issues were also raised in terms of the space provided for this land use and the issues for vulnerable road users caused by pavement parking and inconsiderate parking across East Dunbartonshire.

## **Energy and Heat**

The subject of energy and heat in buildings also generated significant discussion at every adult event, and the results of the general surveys demonstrated that a majority of respondents have already taken some action to decarbonise their homes. The most popular measures already taken were switching to a green energy tariff, switching to more efficient appliances and improving air-tightness, which had been undertaken by 67%, 60% and 58% of respondents respectively. The survey also indicated some intentions to undertake further measures in the near future, but a significant amount of willingness to act is currently being impeded by barriers outwith householders' control, especially in relation to renewables – 54% and 46% of respondents respectively reported unfulfilled desires to install low- or zero-carbon heating and solar PV panels, with cost and property ownership being key issues.



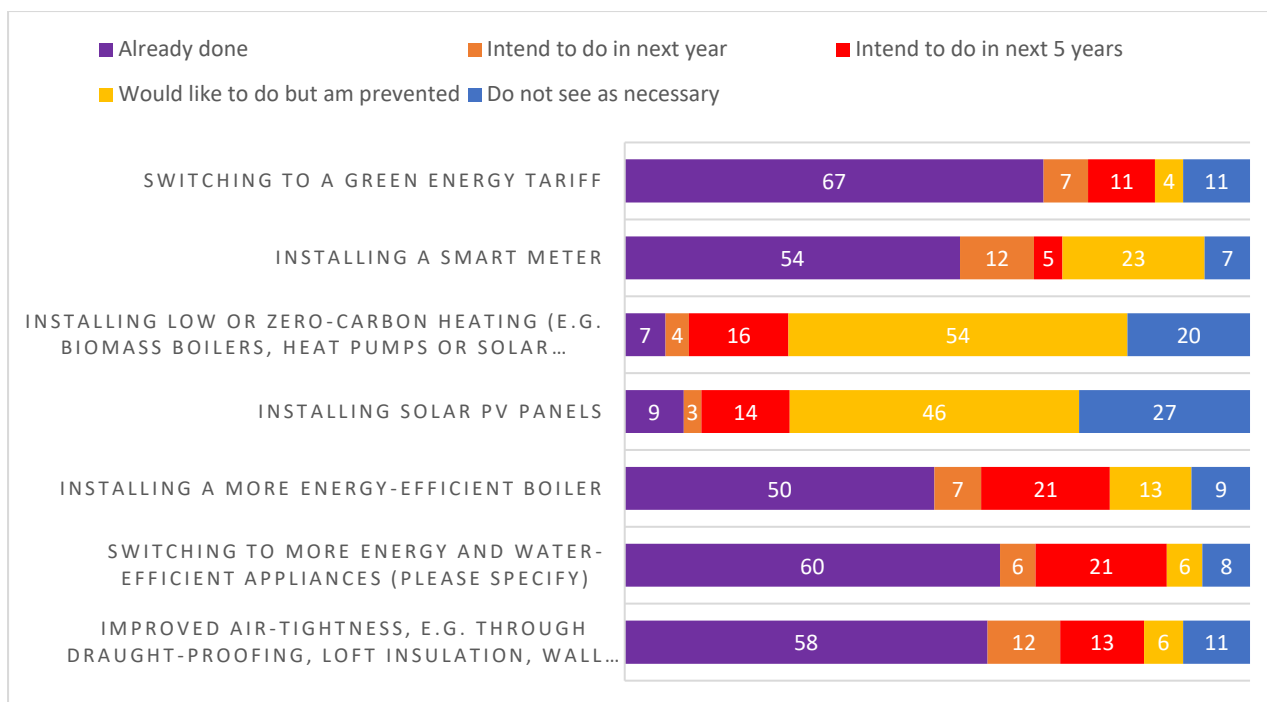


Figure 6: General survey respondents' attitudes to home energy efficiency measures

Responses to the general and business surveys indicated strong support for heat networks, with a respective 75% and 86% of respondents stating that they would connect to a district heating network if they were given the opportunity.

Only four general survey respondents identified buildings within East Dunbartonshire that they considered to be low-carbon exemplars, all of which were private housing. From the survey results and comments recorded at events, there is an evident expectation that the Council should show greater leadership through the decarbonisation of its own estate.

Business survey respondents reported less action than general survey respondents, although 75% of those who responded to the relevant survey questions did report having taken at least one measure to improve energy efficiency and/or emissions; installing a smart meter was the most popular measure, having been undertaken by all of this sub-group. In addition to the information submitted via survey responses, one business advised by email that they had installed lower-carbon heating and renewable electricity technology. 50% of those who responded to the relevant questions recorded an intention to switch to a green energy tariff and to install low- or zero-carbon heating and solar PV panels, and 50% reported unfulfilled desires to upgrade business premises with improved air-tightness. Cost, knowledge and availability were key barriers flagged up by respondents.

These findings will inform the preparation of a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) for East Dunbartonshire, which will be developed in conjunction with the CAP.

### Sustainable Consumption and Production

The sections of the surveys and events themed around 'green economy', 'sustainable consumption and production' and 'procurement' issues focused on waste prevention, re-use and recycling, including issues relating to product design and Council-run services.

The majority of general and business survey respondents – 75% and 89% respectively - reported that they find it quite easy or very easy to sort and recycle their household waste. However, a significant appetite for greater waste reduction was recorded, especially in relation to plastics. A number of participants highlighted limitations on the range of items that can currently be recycled and questioned the final destination of local authority-collected recyclate, following recent media coverage on the issue. Limitations on access to recycling facilities was also raised as a concern, including in relation to the Mavis Valley Recycling Centre, and with a view being expressed that more local recycling facilities should be provided.

In line with the waste hierarchy, which states that preventing waste in the first place is preferable to dealing with it after it has been generated, the vast majority of general survey respondents - 99% - agreed that it is important to reduce the amount of single-use products. The main issues associated with achieving this related to the use of single use packaging in shops and supermarkets.

The appetite for waste reduction was particularly evident among Council employees, with 100% expressing a desire for reducing single-use products in the workplace where suitable alternatives exist, with various workplace-related opportunities being suggested, including stationery, hygiene products and catering goods.

A majority of businesses – 55% - reported using single-use items; of this group, only 20% perceived an opportunity to eliminate their use.

General survey respondents reported that product miles were an important consideration in purchasing decisions, with 54% advising that they sometimes think about how far a product may have travelled and 39% advising that they always consider this. Consideration of product miles was also evident in business survey responses, but to a lesser degree; a combined 38% of respondents selected '5' or '6' on the 1-6 scale of importance placed on low-carbon delivery, where '6' represented 'very important'.

It was evident from the online events that the concept of a circular economy is gaining traction, with participants sharing examples of local good practice and suggesting how these could be built on.

The survey responses contained a clear call on the Council to show leadership in making the economy more sustainable, with 88% of general survey respondents stating that they see the Council as being responsible. The Council's role was discussed in some detail during the online events, with participants asking about plans to work with local businesses and about the scope for using business rates as a way of stimulating more sustainable practices.

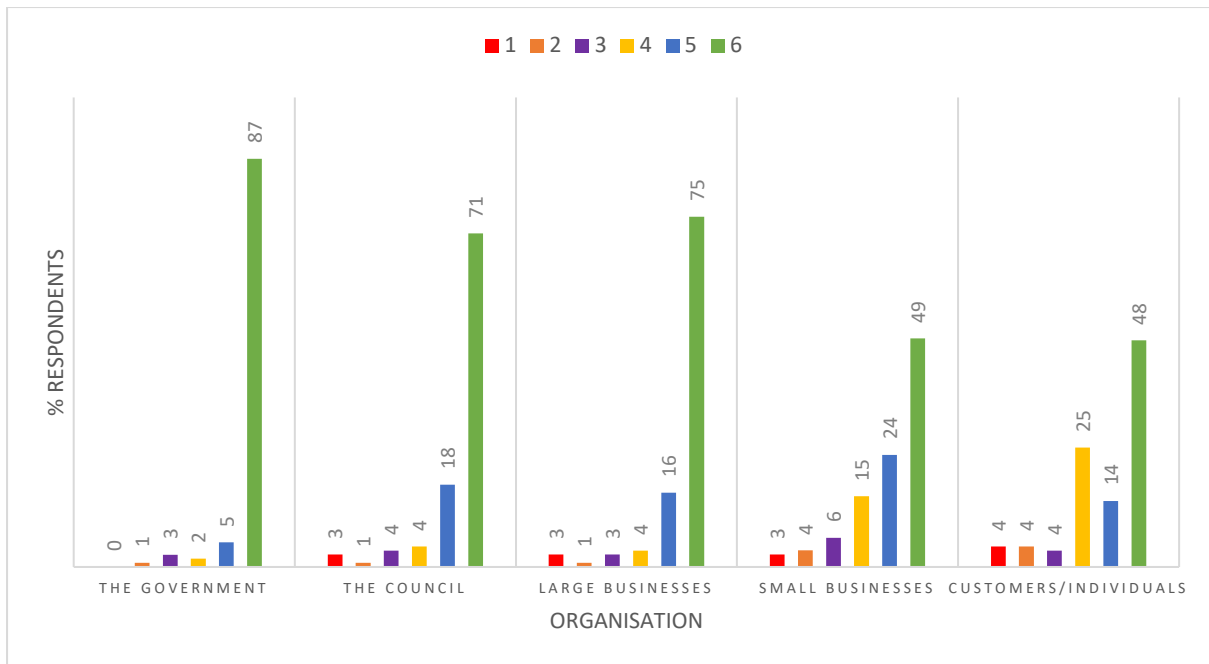


Figure 7: General survey respondents' views on responsibility for making the economy more sustainable (1: low responsibility – 6: high responsibility)

## Biodiversity and Food

Biodiversity was a key focus of the Climate Conversation, given its inherent links with climate change, and evoked strong messages of concern from participants. 91% of general survey respondents and 100% of Council employees consider that we are facing an ecological emergency, with only a minority of general and employee survey respondents – 18% and 3% respectively - considering that the biodiversity of East Dunbartonshire is adequately protected. However, a majority of employees – 65% - consider that biodiversity is somewhat protected; this contrasts with general survey respondents, of whom a majority – 60% - feel that biodiversity is not adequately protected. (The business survey did not include a question of this nature.)

Of the various functions of the natural environment that were presented to respondents, its role as a habitat for wildlife was recognised as being key, with 57% of respondents to the general survey and 41% of employees considering that this was its most important function. An equal percentage – 41% - of employees considered the provision of health and wellbeing benefits to be of primary importance. (The business survey did not include a question of this nature.)

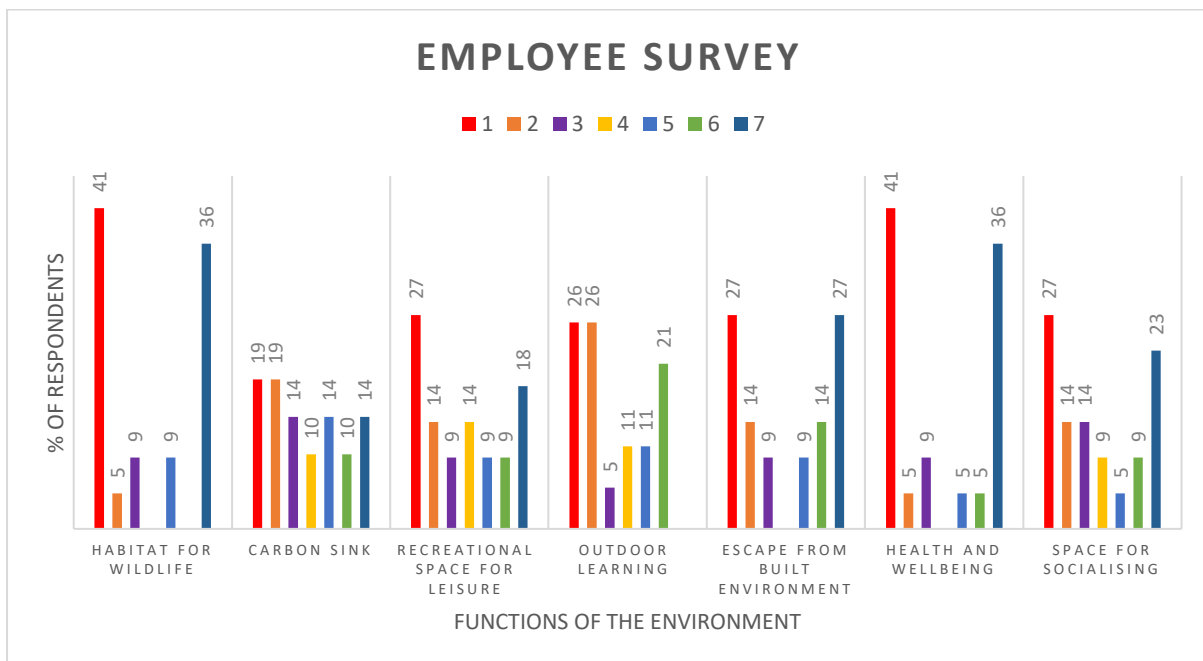
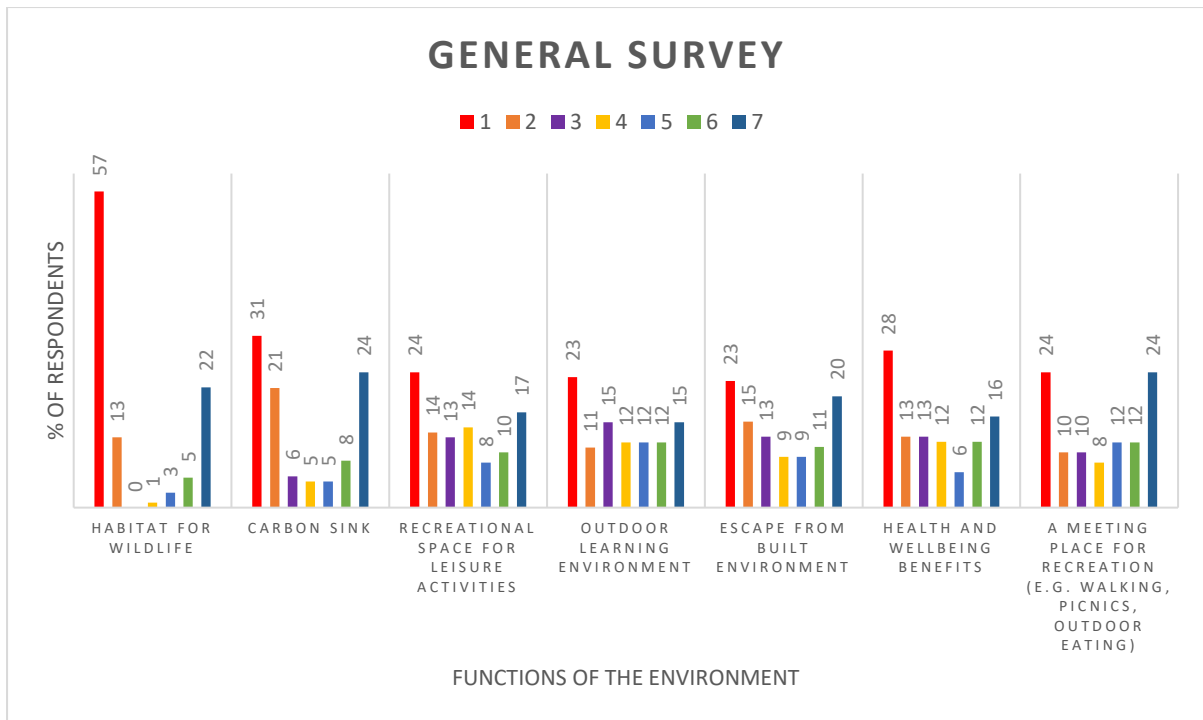


Figure 8: Respondents' valuations of the functions of the natural environment

The majority of respondents to the general survey (76%) supported the proposed introduction of policies to implement changes in land use (e.g. sustainable biomass, tree planting and peatland restoration) that promote carbon sequestration.

The theme of biodiversity generated several discussions during the online events, with key topics including the role of land use planning in assessing and mitigating impacts of built developments, and the potential for street tree planting to delivering multiple benefits. Comments captured during the events also indicated an awareness of and interest in the concept of rewilding, with various

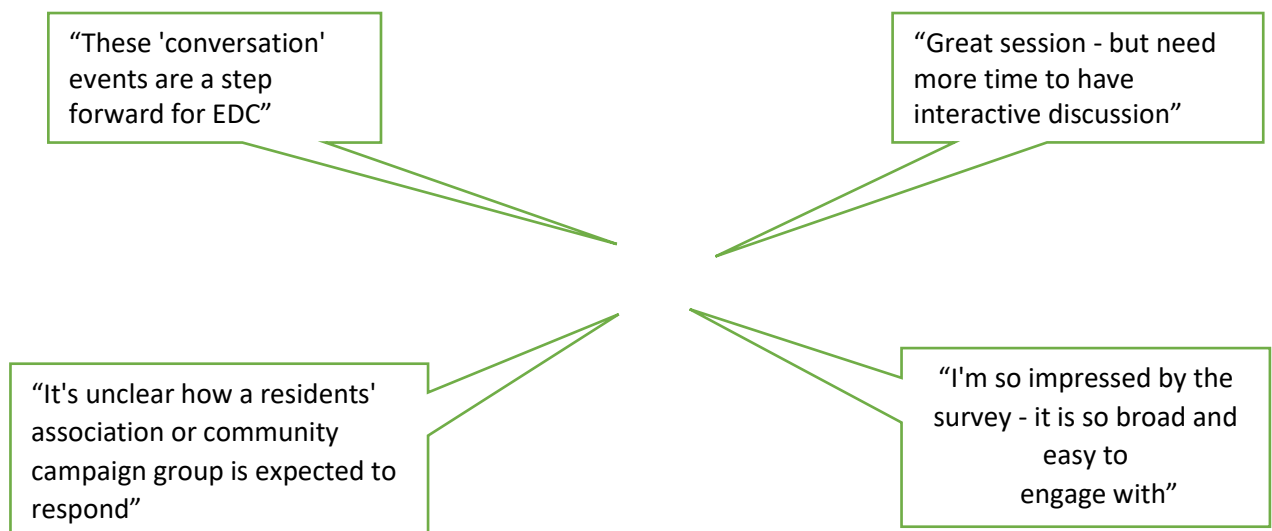
suggestions being made in relation to a number of contexts ranging from back gardens to agricultural landscapes.

General survey respondents also confirmed strong support for the community food growing agenda, with 86% supporting the overall concept and 79% stating that they would participate if they were given an accessible opportunity. An interest in food growing was also recorded at the online events; comments were recorded in support of local opportunities for growing at home, in schools and through allotment sites.

## Feedback on the Climate Conversation Process

In addition to views on climate change, some participants took the opportunity, during the online events and via email, to share views on the consultation process.

Several participants shared positive comments, welcoming the opportunity to engage and commending the format adopted. Others highlighted opportunities for improvement; these included changes to the format of the events to allow more time for interaction, which was acted on during the course of the consultation, with events being redesigned at an early stage to allow for discussion, and with relevant individuals being contacted directly with offers of further discussion. Other opportunities for improvement which were highlighted to the team will inform future rounds of consultation, including a suggestion for paper-based alternatives to the online survey. It was also suggested that a survey specifically designed for community groups should be considered; while community groups were able to be accommodated in the existing format, this suggestion will be considered for future rounds of consultation



## Implications and Next Steps

The Climate Conversation has generated a wide range of data, ideas and views; the project team will now consult with relevant services to consider how Council policy and delivery arrangements should take account of these findings. All comments received will be taken into account in the preparation of a draft CAP and will also inform other relevant plans and strategies, including the revision of Active Travel Strategy and the LHEES, Circular Economy Strategy and Greenspace Strategy, which will be prepared alongside the CAP. The Draft CAP, and drafts of the revised Active Travel Strategy and the

Circular Economy Strategy will then be publicly consulted on, providing further opportunity for input both from participants in Stage 1 of the Climate Conversation and from the wider public.

While the outcomes of these discussions cannot be prejudged, it is anticipated that there will be a shared recognition of the need to set a net zero target for the earliest possible date.