

Climate & Nature Advocacy

Key Findings & Communications Framework

May 2026

Introduction

Fleetwood Strategy was commissioned by The Climate Change Collaboration to conduct an opinion research programme in March and April 2026. The research took the form of a values study, consisting of six online focus groups and a nationally representative poll of n=3,000 respondents.

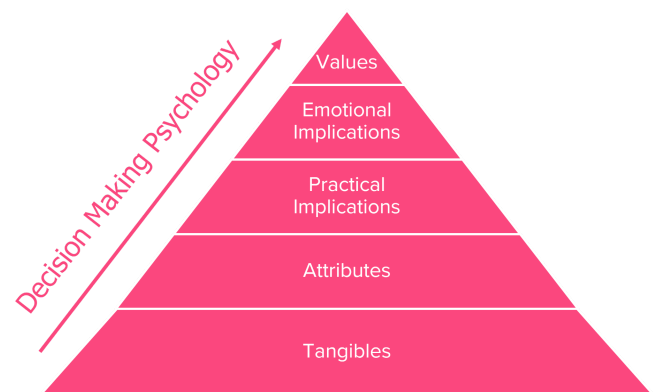
The programme was designed to provide a deep understanding of the positive and negative emotional drivers linked to climate change, nature conservation, and related issues. The findings have been used to construct a communications framework capable of reactivating public engagement more effectively than traditional climate advocacy.

What is a values study?

A values study is a research technique designed to uncover the deep emotional drivers behind an individual's behaviour and help communications connect with the listener on a more instinctive level.

The method is based on a simple insight: people rarely make decisions - whether political, consumer, or advocacy - based on rational arguments alone. Instead, they respond based on how those rational arguments connect to their own priorities, identity, and driving values.

The values research process uncovers the link between tangible rational attributes, their practical impact, the emotional reactions they trigger, and the underlying values they connect to - forming what we call values ladders.



Methodology

Focus groups

The first phase of the research consisted of six online mini focus groups. These groups are particularly vital to values research as they allow participants to articulate not just what they think, but why they think it. Each group consisted of 4 participants, drawn from the following audiences:

1. Left-wing climate advocates
2. Right-wing climate sceptics
3. Politically disengaged voters
4. Voters highly concerned about the cost of living crisis
5. Rural voters
6. Voters with a strong self-reported connection to nature

Nationally representative polling

Following the focus groups, an opinion poll consisting of n = 3,000 GB adults was conducted. Polling complements qualitative research by testing whether the patterns identified in focus groups held at scale across the wider population. Where focus groups reveal the language, emotions, and reasoning people use, polling quantifies how widespread those responses are - and identifies where they vary by demographic group, region, or attitudinal segment.

In a values study, polling determines which values ladders are strongest and most broadly shared, and therefore most likely to succeed as the foundation of a communications strategy.

Key findings and insights

- **Cost of living dominates the British political mood**, with 68% of voters naming it as a top national concern. Other issues like the NHS, immigration, the economy and international conflict also **feel more immediate and personally consequential than environmental issues**, which sit much lower down the agenda (climate change at 11%, environmental issues at 6%).
- **This lower salience is not a sign of indifference.** Three-quarters of voters say they feel a personal connection to nature, and only 4% say they do not care about the environment at all. Across the political spectrum, people describe time spent outdoors as important for their mental and physical health - but only a third treat the environment as a top priority, and just 9% consider themselves highly engaged.
- **Rather, amidst the current cost of living crisis, caring about the environment and taking action has become a luxury.** 61% say they care about the environment but that it is not one of their top priorities right now.
- The central dynamic is that **voters separate “nature” from “the environment.”**
 - Nature is understood in personal, emotional, and local terms - green spaces, wildlife, fresh air and leaving something positive for future generations.
 - “The environment,” by contrast, is associated with institutional language - policy, targets, taxation, and behavioural demands - and is often treated with scepticism as something used to justify costs.
- This distinction shapes how people respond to action. **When voters feel motivated, it is because the outcomes are tangible and meaningful:** a sense of pride in having contributed, a feeling of belonging to a shared effort, and reassurance that future generations will benefit. **Above all, motivation depends on visible, local progress** - changes people can see for themselves in the places they live.
- The dominant experience today is the opposite. **Many voters feel that actions taken in the name of the environment - whether taxes, behaviour changes, or policy commitments - do not lead to visible results, creating a sense of futility.** This is reinforced by a perception of unfairness, with households feeling they are carrying the burden while government and business are not visibly doing their share.
- When action is framed in abstract terms like net zero or global targets, it feels distant and irrelevant; when it imposes costs on household budgets, it feels out of touch. Over time, this combination shifts people from optimism into powerlessness, from collective endeavour into isolation, and from pride into quiet resignation.
- Despite this, there is strong latent alignment when the focus is local and nature-focussed. **Across the political spectrum - including those sceptical of climate politics - there is broad agreement that the natural world close to home is worth protecting.**
- **This creates a clear strategic opening: anchoring advocacy in the language of nature rather than “the environment,” focusing on local and visible progress rather than abstract global goals, and emphasising collective effort over individual sacrifice.** This approach aligns with how voters already think and feel, particularly those who are hardest to persuade, helping to turn existing motivators on while reducing the demotivators that currently dominate.

Audience segmentation

Using advanced statistical analysis of the polling data, we have constructed a segmentation of the British electorate according to their views of and attitudes towards nature, the environment, and advocacy.

Segment	Attitudes	Who are they?
Urban Activists	Deeply engaged with environmental issues. Highly sympathetic to advocacy groups - including more polarising ones such as Just Stop Oil.	13% of the electorate. Skew male, younger, university-educated, higher-income. Live primarily in London and have children. Lean towards Labour politically, though also vote Green and Liberal Democrat.
Nature Lovers	Connected to nature and the environment through experience rather than politics. Spend more time outdoors than any other segment.	16% of the electorate. Skew slightly younger. Politically mixed - with large swathes voting for both the Greens and Reform UK.
Conservationists	Care about the environment but don't treat it as a top priority. Their concern for the environment is centred overwhelmingly on their local nature and green spaces.	22% of the electorate. Skew slightly younger and non-university educated. Politically mixed - though significant numbers vote for Reform UK.
Cash-strapped Environmentalists	Strongly convinced about the need for environmental action but prioritise current financial pressures over environmental action.	18% of the electorate. More likely to be female, on low to middle incomes. Vote for left-leaning parties, particularly Labour.
Activism-alienated	Care about nature but actively hostile towards climate advocacy groups	21% of the electorate. Skew older, middle-income, not university educated. Right-wing, concentrated among Conservative and Reform voters.
Disengaged	Largely unconnected to nature and unengaged with environmental issues.	10% of the electorate. Lower-income, less likely to be university-educated. Politically show low turnout and low engagement.

Communications Framework

The environmental movement has historically been one of British politics' broader churches, capable of bringing together rural conservatives with urban progressives. However, its support coalition has narrowed in recent years.

Two pressures explain this: firstly, the cost of living crisis, which has reordered voter priorities and made any policy ask that carries a financial cost feel disproportionate and dissonant to many households. Secondly, left-wing activists such as Just Stop Oil and Greta Thunberg - perceived as extremists by some - have alienated a large proportion of otherwise supportive voters. This has created the perception that environmentalism is the preserve of a vocal, disruptive fringe rather than a broad national - and collective - interest.

To rebuild support, messaging around nature and the environment needs to reach back to the substantial population of voters in the middle - those who care about nature and the natural world but who do not currently recognise themselves in the environmental movement.

In our segmentation, these voters are split across three segments:

- **Conservationists and Cash-strapped Environmentalists together represent 40% of the electorate.** They care about nature and are open to action, but are not currently mobilised by the movement. The priority with these groups is to convert this latent support into active participation.
- **Activism-alienated, who make up 21% of the electorate, present a different challenge.** They are resistant to climate politics and frustrated by the institutional language of the environmental movement. However, they are not actively opposed to protecting nature; in fact, they feel a strong urge to preserve what already works - such as their local parks. Re-engaging this group will require using nature-led, locally grounded, and less overtly political framing to rebuild trust in and broaden support for climate and nature advocacy.

Communications must nonetheless still account for other segments - protecting alignment with Urban Activists and Nature Lovers without letting their preferences crowd out target audiences, and preventing active opposition from the Disengaged.

This communications framework translates the findings of this research into a practical toolkit. It sets out a foundational frame - the core choice we want the public to make - followed by a narrative structure, key messages (both universal and tailored), messages and framings to avoid, and tactical guidance on which messengers carry the most credibility with various audiences.

Frame: The choice we want the public to make

Right now, many people feel that action taken in the name of “the environment” comes with notable financial and non-financial costs but little visible return. Despite this, individuals are met with constant exhortations to do more - which not only deepens the sense of burden, but quietly devalues the wins they feel they are already making, such as recycling more or driving less.

The result is a sense of distance, unfairness, and futility - where effort feels imposed rather than shared or voluntary, outcomes feel abstract rather than real, and the everyday contributions people do make feel unacknowledged and unappreciated.

But when people think about nature - the places they know, use, and value - their instincts are different. They care about what they can see, what they can take pride in, and what they can pass on.

Therefore, the single foundational frame that climate and nature advocacy groups need to use is one which resonates with these instincts:

CHOOSE: To take the small steps to help preserve your local space and nature and protect it for future generations

AVOID: Losing the spaces and nature that you love and want your children to be able to enjoy

This frame sits at the top of the messaging architecture. Underneath it, a narrative and three universal value ladders translate the frame into specific motivational appeals, and a smaller set of segment-specific ladders allow tailoring where useful.

Narrative: Our elevator pitch

A narrative is the key story that we want to convey to voters. It sets out, in a logical sequence, how we can move people from where they are today to the action we want them to take - establishing their personal contexts and making a case for action that is grounded in our research findings.

Context	<i>How do people see the world?</i>	Things are tough right now, costs are rising, and the world is more uncertain than ever.
Salience & personal relevance	<i>What do they care about?</i>	But in this uncertain world, we're lucky to still have access to nature. The places we enjoy so much in the UK - our parks, our green spaces, our rivers - are more important now than ever. They're where we go to switch off, spend time and make memories with family, and feel a sense of pride in our communities.
Positive differentiation	<i>Why should they take action?</i>	Everyone wants to live somewhere that feels looked after and worth passing on to the next generation. But that doesn't happen on its own. It depends on all of us playing a part - backing the changes that make our local areas cleaner and better to live in.
Negative differentiation	<i>Why are those opposed to action wrong?</i>	It's not necessarily about paying more or making sacrifices. It's just about doing what we can to look after the places we love - or letting them quietly disappear.
Proof points	<i>Why should voters believe you?</i>	You can already see the difference being made in communities like yours: [PROOF POINTS]. That progress happened because people like you got behind it.
Ask	<i>So, what do you want voters to do?</i>	So come and help us make a difference. [ASK]

Message structure

Values ladders provide the architecture for messaging. Effective messages trace the full ladder: they start with something concrete, then connect it to what it does for people, how it makes them feel, and how it links to the values they hold dear.

Values ladders can be translated into a message using a simple three-part structure. Start with a concrete ask, connect it to a practical benefit the audience can see or feel, and then link it to the deeper emotional payoff and end value that make that action meaningful:

You can **[ASK]** ...
so that **[PRACTICAL BENEFIT]** ...
and ensure **[EMOTIONAL BENEFIT / VALUE LINKAGE]**

The 'ask' grounds the message in something the audience can actually do. The practical benefit makes clear why it matters in terms they can see or feel. The emotional payoff connects the action to something deeper that makes it worth doing.

This structure is applied in the following sections to illustrate how the values ladders identified in this study can guide messaging.

Key messages: What works for everyone

The three most important values ladders for motivating the general population to take action, as well as their application in messaging, are shown below.

LADDERS			
Tangible motivator	Knowing I am protecting the environment for future generations to enjoy	Imagining a world where nature is healthy and thriving	Doing something I genuinely care about and feel invested in
Attribute	Long-term	Achievable	Personally relevant
Practical benefit	It ensures my children will live in a nice world in the future	We can take action to address environmental issues	The places I care about are protected
Emotional benefit	I'm helping improve the world around me	A real difference is being made	The effort was worth it
Value	A sense of purpose	Optimistic	Satisfied
MESSAGES			
You can...	<i>Help join a litter clean up</i>	<i>Support your local river restoration project</i>	<i>Help look after your local park</i>
So that...	<i>Your children grow up somewhere clean and nice to live in</i>	<i>You can see real change happening in a place you know and recognise</i>	<i>The places you love are still there to enjoy</i>
And ensure...	<i>You played a part in making the world a better place</i>	<i>You were part of something that actually made a difference</i>	<i>Your time and effort went towards something that genuinely made your life better</i>

Tailored messages: When and how to customise communications to specific audiences

Our values ladder has also found the unique values and emotional payoffs that resonate with specific segments. These differences can range from subtle shifts in tone to entirely new messages.

As with the key messages, effective tailored communications should trace the values ladders that are strongest to each segment. To illustrate, a unique ladder is given for each segment below. Some differ significantly from those of the general population, while others differ less.

	Urban Activists	Nature Lovers	Conservationists	Cash-strapped Environmentalists	Activism-alienated
LADDERS					
Tangible motivator	Being part of a collective effort to protect the environment	Imagining a future where nature is healthy and thriving	Imagining a future where nature is healthy and thriving	Knowing I am protecting the environment for future generations to enjoy	Helping make my local area a nicer place to live
Attribute	Universal	Achievable	Achievable	Long-term	Personally relevant
Practical benefit	It's something I strongly believe in	We can take action to address environmental issues	The places I care about are protected	It ensures my children will live in a nice world in the future	Daily life for people like me will be better
Emotional benefit	I'm part of something bigger than myself	A real difference is being made	I've made a difference	I'm helping improve the world around me	I've done my part
Value	Proud	Fulfilled	Proud	Peace of mind	Fulfilled
MESSAGES					
You can...	Join the campaign to protect your local green spaces	Back your local wildlife restoration project	Get behind the effort to restore your local green spaces	Do whatever you are able to do	Help look after the park down the road
So that...	You're standing up for something you truly believe in	The nature you love has a real chance to recover and thrive	The places you care about are looked after and protected	Your children grow up in a world that's been looked after	The places you walk past every day are a bit cleaner and a bit nicer
And ensure...	You're part of a movement bigger than any one person	You've done your part for society	You helped make a real difference to this world	You have peace of mind knowing you helped make that happen	You've done your part for the place you call home

What not to say: The messages that alienate

The messages to avoid below are built both on the values laddering and the broader framework context - the separation of “nature” from the “environment” in voters’ minds, the predominance of cost-of-living pressures, and the lack of trust in institutional actors to take action on the environment.

Avoid:

- **Promises without proof:** Top-down policy commitments, government pledges, and vague aspirations like "a better future is within reach" trigger the distrust voters already carry. Don't lead with what will happen - lead with what already has happened.
- **Asks that load cost or sacrifice onto households:** Under cost-of-living pressure, these activate the unfairness lever harder than any other framing.
- **Messaging that feels preachy or condescending:** When communications imply that people should “care more” or be doing more, they risk triggering a feeling of guilt which drives disengagement or avoidant behaviour. This is particularly acute among the Activism-alienated.
- **Catastrophist framing:** Existential-threat language triggers a feeling of being overwhelmed, and does not motivate action.
- **Jargon:** Phrases such as “decarbonisation” and “ESG” are abstract and make action feel inaccessible to many voters.

Messengers: Who is most trusted to talk about these issues

Both the qualitative and quantitative findings point to a small number of voices with broad credibility, supported by a wider network of place-based, cultural, and civic figures who can extend that credibility into communities where institutional voices struggle. Equally important is what to default away from - the voices that activate the demotivator ladder by making advocacy feel tribal, futile, or out of touch.

Voices to engage

Environmental charities are the most trusted source on nature and the environment out of any messenger tested. They have particular sway over target audiences. Examples of messengers to utilise include:

- WWF UK
- National Trust
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Woodland Trust
- Friends of the Earth
- John Muir Trust

Scientists and academics are also highly trusted, especially when used to anchor claims about scale, progress, and outcomes. However, this must be balanced against the need to keep messaging accessible and avoid esoteric language.

Local and place-based voices are the most powerful extension of charity and scientific credibility, particularly for Conservationists. They sidestep institutional distrust and embody the visible, local action voters want to see, making them the natural bridge into communities where national voices struggle. Examples include:

- River keepers and local angling associations
- Farmer and agricultural networks
- National Park authorities
- Local Wildlife Trust officers

And finally, **civic and cultural figures offer an effective route into more sceptical audiences.** They are credibly engaged with nature but not regarded as activist or political. Such figures could include:

- Natural history broadcasters: Sir David Attenborough, Steve Backshall, Michaela Strachan, Iolo Williams, Hamza Yassin, Gillian Burke
- Gardening voices: Monty Don, Alan Titchmarsh, Carol Klein, Frances Tophill
- Outdoors and rural voices: Robson Green, Ben Fogle, Paul Whitehouse, Julia Bradbury
- Nature writers and farmer-authors: Robert Macfarlane, Helen Macdonald, James Rebanks, Isabella Tree
- Faith leaders speaking on stewardship where issue-relevant

Voices to avoid

Disruption-associated activism carries the heaviest negative net favourability of any voice tested, and demotivates target audiences by making action feel tribal, futile, and inaccessible. Examples to avoid include:

- Just Stop Oil and associated individuals such as Indigo Rumbelow or Phoebe Plummer
- Extinction Rebellion
- This is Rigged

- Youth Demand
- Animal Rising
- Roger Hallam and figures whose public profile is built around disruption

Government should be treated as an accountable party held to its commitments, not as a persuasive voice. **Trust in government on this issue is low, and the qualitative findings show particular hostility to the Government speaking about the climate** - perceived as a buzzword used to justify costs and lifestyle sacrifices.

Businesses speaking unilaterally have similarly thin credibility on their own. They can be used within a visibly broad coalition to contribute to a sense of community, but should not lead messaging. Particular caution applies to:

- Oil and gas majors on climate transition (high greenwashing risk)
- Energy retailers on net zero
- Sustainability-focussed brands without a credible track record

Polarising or partisan voices bring some upside with the already-engaged but significant risk with the audiences the framework is designed to reach. Examples to avoid include:

- Partisan media commentators associated with climate culture wars
- Lifestyle influencers without demonstrated environmental credibility
- Politicians seeking to associate themselves with the cause for political benefit



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