

## Holyrood 350 - Scottish Parliament event on 10 Sept 2009

When people from community carbon reduction initiatives from across Scotland went to the Scottish Parliament on Thursday 10 September, we went to ask them to implement a 4 point policy framework that can work with the grain of community action, rather than us always working against the grain of the overall economic and political framework. We argued that these first steps – although completely insufficient in themselves – can enable us to break the deadlock (see [www.holyrood350.org](http://www.holyrood350.org)). These steps can enable us to begin moving in the right direction, not only at the community level but at the national level. Just as community initiatives can inspire others to take response-ability and act, so one country acting boldly can help break the international deadlock and kick-start the race out of carbon.

On Thursday 10 September 2009, people from across Scotland who are working to reduce their communities carbon emissions, came together in the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood to ask the Scottish Government to put in place a radical policy framework to ensure that we collectively decarbonise society fast.

This had been billed as ‘A Climate Active Party in the Parliament’, and it was extraordinary that we had a completely full house of people, passionate about their community level work and wanting to take this work to the national level too, aware that without that our work will come to nothing, and aware that with that, we can become an example to the world of how a society can address climate change and peak oil, and improve our quality of life in the process.

The day was organized by people from a range of community carbon reduction initiatives – we’ve called ourselves Holyrood 350, since we aim to ensure that Holyrood creates the right framework to enable us to play our part in getting emissions back down to a safe level below 350ppm.

We offered food, and Hamish Moore played his bagpipes beautifully slowing the pace as people entered the largest committee room in Holyrood (it can take a hundred folk), a room with a real sense of space: high up with high ceilings, and stunning views to Arthurs Seat and the Pentland Hills beyond.

We were warmly welcomed by Aileen Campbell MSP, and we then welcomed the MSPs and everyone to a celebration of community action. We began by offering them stories of what is possible if people put their energies into making change happen – stories to let them know what we’re doing, and stories to give them the courage to join us in acting boldly. The stories were from a range of communities across Scotland: Lucy Conway spoke about community-owned renewables and living within limits on the Isle of Eigg, Mike Small spoke about how people had been inspired to eat local through the Fife Diet, Tom Black spoke about Portobello’s Transition Town initiative on the edge of the capital, and Danny Alderslowe spoke about a range of relocalisation initiatives across Glasgow’s inner city. The last story ended with Danny voicing our resounding thanks to this Government and this Parliament for two extraordinary pieces of legislation. The first being the £27.4 million Climate Challenge Fund to support community carbon-reduction initiatives that was proposed by the Greens and taken up by the Scottish National Party Government, the second being the recent Climate Change Bill unanimously passed by the Parliament, establishing the world’s most ambitious emission reduction targets of 42% by 2020, and 80% by 2050.

Immediately after we had applauded their ambitious targets, the experts we had brought in began the process of explaining why these targets were not nearly enough and what we need to do to address this problem.

Tim Helweg-Larsen from the Public Interest research Centre in Machynlleth, summarized PIRC's Climate Safety report, clearly articulating why the science is saying such targets are nowhere near bold enough, and that we need to take action to get down from the current carbon overshoot of 387ppm, and get back below 350ppm as soon as possible.

In the light of the science, in response to the need to meet and surpass Holyrood's targets, and in line with the action communities across Scotland have embarked on, we presented three perspectives on Holyrood 350's proposed plan of action: 4 steps to create a policy framework to support and enable all communities in Scotland to take effective action and so enable Scotland to lead the world by example.

Brian Davey presented 'Cap and Share' as the first crucial step to limit and rapidly reduce carbon coming into the economy, and to redistribute wealth so that the majority of people who emit below the average are financially rewarded and the high-emitters penalized, as the cost of fossil fuels and carbon embedded products soar and renewable energy schemes and carbon-neutral products become competitive.

Duncan McLaren, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, presented the recent 'Power of Scotland Renewed' report, supporting Holyrood 350's target of getting back below 350ppm and outlining how Scotland could become energy healthy, with 100% renewable energy by 2030.

The final presenter, Shaun Chamberlin, author of Transition Timeline, argued for relocalisation. That very morning Shaun had turned his final power-point slide upside down to be in keeping with the event. Previously, it had placed a Copenhagen agreement at the top, with national policies (such as Tradable Energy Quotas) as ways of implementing such an agreement, and then community and individual action below that as the place where emissions and zero-carbon lifestyles actually take place. In his presentation, Shaun reversed this and placed us coming together in communities to take action as the first step, and then the next step being all these communities (such as those involved in Holyrood 350) coming together to ensure a national framework is put in place to enable community action to flourish and to inspire agreement between countries internationally.

Perhaps Shaun's slide sums up the politics we are attempting: we need to act, and through that to inspire others to act, and if the politicians can't see the steps needed then we will have to show them, and if they won't take them then we'll have to keep building a movement that can insist they take those steps, or we'll take them for them.

Which brings us to the next steps.

The first hour had (as is obvious now!) been packed with way too many speakers. We had crammed all the celebration of community action, the applause for Parliament's work so far, the stark science, and Holyrood 350's policy framework, into an hour in order to ensure each MSP and Government Minister who had come would get a good sweep of the story before vanishing. The fact that a dozen

MSPs, including one Minister, (out of a total of 129) turned up can be seen as a success, or as a failure, but it was certainly a start. After the presentations they did (as we anticipated) all vanish, and we broke into workshops focusing on the 4 points of the action framework (capping carbon, community-owned renewables, a real Green New Deal, and transition through relocalisation). Within each workshop people flagged up their area of interest and broke into groups focusing on these. In fact we hadn't thought the workshops through well enough and – although some very interesting discussion happened – the necessary expertise on each subject was often lacking, and time was lacking, for them to be really satisfying.

After the workshops, we came together in a plenary, a meeting which one of the politicians present later described as feeling like a medieval moot. The purpose of the plenary was to discuss how to take this forward, how to map out the next steps for this politically engaged aspect of the relocalisation movement. It was slightly chaotic, but open, fluid, powerful stuff. The cultural story we have all been told has been falling apart as ecologies and economies teeter on the brink, and the reassuring mantras of business as usual regularly fail to convince the man or woman in the street. There is the cultural and political space to make the dramatic changes that need to happen, happen; but how?

A community approach to the 'how of politics' might be to map the territory, see what is unique to the context, ask what stories people are passionate about here, weave these into ways of encouraging them to realise their power and realise the predicament we are in: bringing them on board with a positive vision of how we need to – and can - reshape society, fast.

A community approach to the 'who of politicians' might be to build relationships with Politicians, actively communicate our appreciation of each of them when they are taking the right steps, invite them to join us, to be part of our communities and not just representatives of communities: enabling our communities to show them leadership, and insisting they join that leadership too.

A community approach to the 'what next?' of this particular political development may well involve another gathering in Parliament in January or February, where we focus on the economics (the 'how do we build sustainable secure outward-looking communities?') aspect. Fully aware that the UN December 2009 Copenhagen meeting is very unlikely to produce anything like the agreements we collectively need, and aware that the economy is almost certainly going to take a far more serious nose-dive (probably later in 2010, but possibly much earlier), we are asking whether the Jan/Feb meeting should refocus our attention on the climate of our communities (their social and material health) as much as on the ecological climate? If economic growth is driving, not only the destruction of ecologies, but the destruction of communities, do we present the evolving Holyrood 350 policy proposals as a framework that can help ensure individuals, families and communities sufficiency, safety and well-being in the current climate?

Some very exciting ideas have emerged involving using a petition to the petitions committee as a way of building referendum-type support for the actions we are proposing, taking debate and theatre out to communities across Scotland in a travelling roadshow to build support both for local community action, and for action at the national level that can enable all communities to become resilient sustainable and inspiring, and bringing the power of theatre to the Parliament itself. Very exciting ideas, very real questions starting with 'can we do it?' Well, we've begun.