

# Analysis of Carbon Literacy Pledges Interviews



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## Executive summary

The Carbon Literacy training was highly valued by participants\*, who were impressed with the quality of course teaching and content, enjoying the opportunity to engage in group exchanges. They reported increased knowledge, motivation, and a strong sense of shared purpose. Pledges ranged widely and many found the session materials, discussions, and alignment with existing plans helpful in shaping their commitments, identifying scale, ambition and self-awareness as important factors in decision-making. A notable challenge, however, emerged among participants already engaged in low-carbon behaviours, who struggled to identify new, meaningful actions.

Most participants completed at least one pledge and were refreshingly self-critical, showing good awareness of the challenges they faced. Complexity was identified as an important inhibitor of success, though unanticipated discoveries and developments also proved to be barriers. Pledge outcomes varied significantly by type, with food-related pledges the most successful, supported by their practicality and ease of integration into daily routines. Property-related pledges such as installing solar panels or upgrading heating systems were the least successful when they involved major changes, largely due to complexity, cost, and time. However, participants who limited these pledges to information-gathering generally achieved their goals. Pledges involving talking to others about climate change also proved difficult.

Feedback on the training itself was uniformly positive. Participants valued the quality of information, the diversity of perspectives and the sense of collective progress. Recommendations focused on providing post-course materials, enabling continued peer support and offering practical guidance for advocacy activities. Overall, there was a strong sense of progress and personal growth, contributing to a determination to build on the foundations established on the course.

\*Reference throughout is to participants rather than respondents. Interviewees were self-selecting, though it should be noted that those participating represent over half of the total number who completed the course.

## 1. Numbers

Total analysed	23 (details below)
Did the session help in choosing pledges?	8 yes, 1 no
Impact of current practices on choice of pledge	10 made it difficult
Completed both pledges	8
Completed one pledge	12
Completion of one pledge (personal)	5 (3 as originally envisaged)
Completion of one pledge (group)	7
Completed no pledges	3
Critical of pledges	1
Completed other related actions	3 (2 in addition to main pledges)
Solar panels	4
Heating	2
Insulation	2
Heating and insulation	2
Benefits	18*
Benefits (personal)	5
Benefits (environment)	5
Benefits (personal and environmental)	10
Member of group other than SCA	14
Positive view of the course	15
Negative view of course	0

\*One was anomalous and was therefore omitted from the total. When asked directly if there had been any benefits, the participant replied, "Not really, no" and explained that "It's my mind set-up". This was despite evidence of the opposite in the interview prior to that.

Number of participants interviewed from each course:

September 2024 (5: [out of] 6), November 2024 (7:8), February 2025 (3:9), March 2025 (6:9), June 2025 (2:12)

Summary of numbers

1. A third of respondents said that the session helped them to decide on their pledges and only one respondent said that they did not find it a help.
2. A recurrent theme, applying to nearly half the respondents, was the difficulty in identifying a personal pledge when they were already doing so much to minimise their carbon imprint.
3. While just over a third of respondents completed both pledges, those completing neither was very small (n3). A majority completed at least one pledge, with community pledges being slightly more successful than personal ones.
4. Nearly half the respondents chose personal pledges that involved the installation of solar panels, changes to heating or improvements in insulation.
5. Three-quarters of respondents identified benefits arising from their pledges, over half of them referring to both personal and environmental benefits.
6. Over two-thirds of respondents were members of groups other than SCA.
7. Over two-thirds of respondents made positive comments about the course and the teaching and there were no negative comments.

## 2. Detailed analysis

### Choosing pledges

There was a wide range of pledges and a variety of motivations and approaches to decision-making. Some participants found the handouts helpful, some found inspiration or focus in the session itself, while others pointed to the opportunity for discussion and sharing ideas, but the most common theme was that pledges aligned with current plans or thinking. Only one participant did not find the training helpful in deciding on a pledge, explaining that they struggled with “technical stuff”.

Advice on pledge selection focused on scale and feasibility and might usefully be summed up by Kate’s observation that pledges “had to be within reach”.

Perhaps the most interesting outcome of the interviews was the problem faced by those already committed to reducing carbon emissions. These participants found their options narrowed to the point where finding something new was challenging, and it is perhaps ironic that those already contributing significantly to what the training is designed to promote should find themselves disadvantaged in this way.

### Finding examples in the handouts:

there was something in there about engaging with people and also obviously something in there about solar panels (Miranda)

Well, the list of pledges which was handed out as a hard copy and it's online now. It's actually quite useful to start with something like that, because even if you don't do any of those, you can actually see what a broad range of possibilities there are. (Alice)

### The pledges session as a motivating factor or focus for thinking:

it helps you to focus on, you know, one is, “What's the message on trying to get out? What's the, you know, the impact?” (Charles)

I felt that the carbon literacy training pledge gave me the impetus to say even when things are tricky, maybe especially when things are tricky, we actually need to tackle them head on (Maria)

And without this pledge, I think I probably would still have a gas hob. So the pledge carried me over that. (Adrian)

### The value of discussion:

I did have a bit of discussion with [name] and she made one or two pointers (Anil)

just listening to other people and what they're doing is helpful as well, because that gives you an idea of the range of possibilities (Alice)

It was good to see alternatives and to hear other people talking about it. (Adrian)

we were discussing all sorts of things within the group (Jessica)

### Fitting in with current plans, thinking or beliefs:

something that I've been thinking about for a while (Miranda)

the first one was easy... That was planned already. (Adrian)

things that were near that I was already involved in (Francesca)

It's definitely something that occurred to me before. (Imogen)

it was something I believe in (Safina)

### Advice:

I would keep the scale small, small and feasible. Because if you're going to pledge something massive, then the road to failure is probably right in front of you. ... put something that you genuinely want to find out and do. (Maria)

Probably keep open to areas of your life that you can work on and just see where that takes you ... keep yourself open. (Kate)

you need to know yourself... Do it (a) because you really mean it, and (b) because you know deep down in your heart of hearts that you will stick to it. (Oliver)

If you've got to choose between something that's quite ambitious and something that's very modest, go for the modest one, because you can't always predict how difficult it might be. And a definite change that's modest is more effective than a massive change that never takes place (Adrian)

Problem of finding something new:

I was struggling to find a thing to do personally because I've already done so many things (Anil) you do an awful lot of things, you do all the low hanging fruit, and then you have to make a decision. So do I keep going and just do lots of low hanging fruit, or do I try and do something which might actually have an impact? (Alice)

Well, all the things that were discussed at the session, as things you might be able to do, quite a few of them I was already doing. (William)

I'm already doing everything I can think of within my capacity. (Shirley)

it was okay except the personal pledges because I knew what's easy I've done (Safina)

I didn't feel like I had a lot of choice because I feel like I do as much as I can. (Candy)

I'd also started a lot of very new things that were sustainable projects, so there was nothing new that could be big enough. (Kate)

It's perhaps also worth noting that one participant had reservations about the pledges themselves:

I don't think they're a very good thing. ... Soreally, I felt that I was being almost forced into doing something that had to be done because it was a part of the course. But something that I felt uncomfortable about, didn't really feel was necessary and it somehow felt that they're saying, "Unless you can do this, you're not kosher. You haven't learnt enough." Or, you know, as I think I said to you before, you know, "You've failed in some way." (Oliver)

### Achievement of pledges

Although nearly all participants completed at least one pledge, they were often self-critical and showed good awareness of the nature of the challenges they faced and how their approach had contributed to the eventual outcome. Isabella, for example, chose a reading project that didn't align with her personality as "a massive mood reader", which led to her "forcing myself to read books when I'm not in the mood". Complexity was an important inhibitor of success and Anil's discovery was fairly typical: "the more I've gone into it, the more complicated that's got". Participants were also aware that "there are other distractions" (Charles) and that "stuff gets in the way ... I think a lot of us are prone to optimism bias and you think you can fit an awful lot into your life." (William)

Nevertheless, there seemed to be a general feeling that "it's part of the development that all of us in theory should be on" (Safina) and where the pledge itself proved impossible to achieve, some participants found alternatives that delivered tangible benefits: "I got an electric bike... I use it all the time. So that's a massive" (Olivia)

A quarter of the participants (6) chose food as the basis for their personal pledge, some focusing on consumption and others on waste, and this proved to be the most successful topic, with no failures. What characterised the approach in all cases was a realistic assessment of what was possible and the decision to work the change into established routines and practices:

I chose the lamb and the beef one really because in my understanding those two sets of animals were the ones that are the worst for affecting the climate of all the things we eat in the way of animal products. I didn't really want to give up eating all meat (Oliver)

Well, the meat I've cut down on ruminants. But as the course explained, it's those that do the most damage. And in reading other books as well, there's a really good book by Hannah Ritchie called *Not the End of the World*. And she makes the point that you're getting 90% or more of the way there if you just stop eating red meat and go to chicken if you like. So I've stopped eating red meat of that kind, you know, the lamb and beef, and also cut down on the milk. (William)

I think it was more a case of what I was able to do and what would fit in with what I'm already doing in the area. ... I don't waste much food at all. (Nick)

There's no point making a pledge that you can't do. So, saving money with reduced food, cutting out red meat, that's workable. (Conrad)

So it's just something I can do, like slot in in my free time when I can. (Isabella)

My target was not to do pledges, my target was just to fill in the gaps (Shirley)

The least successful category of pledge was that relating to property. Nearly half of the participants (10) chose a pledge relating to their property (installation of solar panels, change of heating system or insulation), but only the four of these who limited their pledge to gathering information were successful. The main obstacle to success for those seeking to make changes was complexity, though cost and time were sometimes also considerations. Nevertheless, progress was made in terms of information gathering, so in this respect all 10 had at least a measure of success.

#### Complexity:

I think the providers of quotes don't give you as much information as they could. I think they're marketers, basically. (Alice)

I find that whole field complex ... So I did my three quotations and what's interesting is, even though I now have a lot more information I'm as confused as I was before. And that, in its way, that's quite important because what I have learned is how difficult it is to do this and how easily you could be basically ripped off by unscrupulous installers because of difficulty in understanding the answers they have given you to basic questions. (Alice)

I know a few of the local plumbers but I'm not at all sure that they're capable of doing a bathroom wall should they have to in order to get that unit installed. (Francesca)

#### Cost:

it looked like it was still going to cost upwards of ten thousand pounds which is money that I don't have at the moment (Miranda)

it's a lot of money (Alice)

I've investigated having it [cavity wall insulation] all sucked out, and it would cost over £5,000 to have it sucked out and replaced, which is just not worth it in a way. (Adam)

But the trouble is, we've had one grant for the wood pellet boilers, we wouldn't get the other grant for air source heat pumps and it would still cost a lot of money, so we're sort of considering, and the wood pellet boiler is working quite well so it's a difficult choice. (Adam)

And so to do the three heat pumps with the subsidy, it was going to be £41,000. So that was prohibitively expensive. (Maria)

#### Time:

the home project of replacing the shower arrangement with an instant heater basically stalled because of the time, money and health (Francesca)

So it's actually a question of how do we time it. [Installation of solar panels] (Olivia)

So it's just a time thing ... it's going to have to be in my to-do list for next winter (Imogen)

## Unanticipated discoveries:

there's a covenant, district council covenant on the house is in our development which says that you can't change the external appearance of the front of the house and so I need to look into that as well with the suppliers (Miranda)

what I found was when I was looking at solar panels, if I did a search on the web, I would do a search on the web but of course all these algorithms would pick it up and you'd just be inundated. And I just couldn't stand that. It was just, so... Everytime I went for a search, to do a search, I thought, "Am I prepared for all the, you know, the phone calls?" The, you know, whatever it is. And I just didn't want to do it. So, so that was a barrier. That was a real barrier. (Olivia)

## Those opting for information gathering seemed aware that this offered a realistic prospect of success:

I was realistic enough to say I'm pledging to really do my homework and look into it. (Maria)

I thought, "Well, maybe it might be possible to arrange solar panels, get enough in to be worthwhile. At least I can have that investigated, and that would be meeting the pledge even if the outcome is negative." (Geoffrey)

The other category that proved more difficult than anticipated was talking to others about the climate. Perhaps surprisingly, none of the participants who made this one of their pledges was successful. Candy suggested that the difficulty might arise from a perception that talking about climate change is "all too overwhelming". Other participants, who did not make this one of their pledges, identified approaches that they had found successful. Alice, for example, said that one of the advantages of being a trainer is that "you can find ways of talking to other people about it that don't just end in despair", while Imogen thought it was important to "just talk about it more and everybody what you've done" as a result of the training. Referring to a domestic context, Olivia identified an interesting outcome of the training: "I'm talking to my husband more about climate. So, you know, the food that we eat in particular."

## The problem of negativity:

No, in that area I haven't [achieved my pledge to talk to family and friends about climate issues] because it kills conversation for me. I haven't found a jolly way to do it because it isn't jolly. It's depressing. I could be depressed about it all, to try and not to be. And when you meet family and friends it's about positive things. And there's so much negativity in the world that you suddenly feel you're putting a big black cloud on everything. Yes. It's hard. (Safina)

## Indifference and deflection:

There's a group of us, we tend to walk in pairs and stop and switch so you get a chance to talk to everyone. So I was telling them all about it [climate change] and they were just sort of glazing over. So maybe I was too full-on because I'd just done the course or something, but I do try (Candy)

I was talking about it being polluted, he changed subject. Just saying, "Well, what we were talking earlier," which was about Celebrity Traitors. I mean he just didn't want to follow up on it or pick up on it at all. (Candy)

## Rejection and its impact:

Everybody's been saying, "Gosh, you know, it really is hot." And then I take the opportunity to say, "Well, you know, the climate is changing and," you know, "what do you think about it?" Introducing the topic. And sometimes I get the responses or stuff and nonsense, you know, it's a natural thing which is occurring. What we have to do is to try and adapt to it. And the

general feeling is that, no, no, it's not really anything to do with us. I've never had very extended conversations about climate change and its causes, but I have tried to bring up the subject occasionally. I have to admit it is only occasionally. (Oliver)

There was a wide range of pledges in addition to the above, with volunteering (9 participants) and actively promoting change (5 participants) being particularly prominent as group pledges, the latter generally proving more successful than the former. Actions ranged from involvement in local councils (Imogen, Adam) and writing to local newspapers (Charles) to promoting actions in specific communities (Conrad, Jessica) and challenging environmentally detrimental practices in supermarkets (Jessica).

### Carbon Literacy training

Evaluation of the course and the teaching was uniformly positive and the vast majority of the comments were unsolicited. The way in which the course contributed to knowledge was something that many participants highlighted, some of them pointing to the advantages of epistemic diversity and the associated opportunity to learn from others. Charles' reference to "the ripple effect" of the course made explicit what underlay many appraisals of the impact of the course and what was perhaps its most encouraging impact: the extent to which it fostered a recognition of personal progress and a determination to continue taking action in order to address the challenges of climate change.

### Evaluation of the course:

- the training was very good (Miranda)
- the course was very well delivered (Anil)
- I was very admiring of your patience and of the amount of effort you put in. (Alice)
- I felt that it was fulfilling... It was great. (Adrian)
- I thought the course was very good. (William)
- I think the course was handled really well. (Candy)
- I'm very glad I did it. I learned a lot. (Jessica)
- [Names] are very good teachers... they did it very, very well in my view. (Nick)
- You're doing great work here. (Olivia)
- the sessions as a whole were excellent (Geoffrey)

### Expanding knowledge:

- The information that came out of the course is really useful because, well, there was a lot of detail that I wasn't aware of in terms of the climate crisis and like climate change... I plan to learn more and just keep on going ... (Kate)
- I'd like to think that it's contributed to my deep-down wider knowledge bank. (Miranda)
- it's widened my scope of knowledge on both topics ... I'm still focused on how can I reduce carbon and this is part of that journey. (Anil)
- attending the meeting was more to fill in the gaps in my knowledge. (Shirley)
- I've learnt a lot of stuff I didn't know before. That has to be a good thing. (Oliver)

### Sharing knowledge and understanding:

- I think a mix of different experiences and knowledge is a good thing ... The course was really useful just to get some clarity on some things and to make sure my understanding was correct on those things that I believed. (William)
- what I really enjoyed about the course as well was sitting around in a room full of people with different baselines of knowledge. I had more on some aspects and others, more on, you know, it was very different levels of knowledge on different subjects as well (Kate)

I feel useful... It's a social contact. And it's learning from others. (Safina)  
 it was just the throwaway conversation when we were chatting about our pledge towards the end, and that throwaway conversation was what made me realise I actually had a really terrific opportunity to cut my individual carbon footprint. (Alice)

#### Impact and commitment to action:

I would say the Carbon Literacy Programme has actually had a significant impact on my carbon footprint. (Alice)

I think it's pushed me (Jessica)

And that is a really, really key thing that people who come in and do the carbon literacy training... getting involved in action. (Miranda)

even people who've been looking at climate change for years and who are very conversant on the science would benefit from doing the course because it actually makes you think about what to do in practical terms rather than just going into a despairing mush when nothing seems to be working... I think the main message from the carbon literacy training was there's always going to be something you can do. (Alice)

I want to keep volunteering and I want to just keep learning and I want to keep, like, putting my free time into it. (Isabella)

it's enabled me to improve my lifestyle... you think what I would like to give a bit back to the community? (Nick)

#### Participant recommendations

Two categories of advice picked up on aspects that had featured in different forms in the feedback: handling information and sharing. Comments on the quality of the information provided and its delivery were uniformly positive, but some participants felt that more help was needed in order to overcome the limitations of memory and recommended that key points be made available retrospectively. The sense of shared discovery and progress was a theme running through the responses and two of the participants recommended facilitating post-course contact and exchange. The only other recommendation, apart from more general advice, came from Jessica, whose pledge involved writing to an organisation in order to promote positive change: "I just didn't know how to formulate the letter. Or indeed, who to write to. That might be something that you could help with."

#### Information:

I found the course session kind of almost overwhelming because of the quantity of information in it. And if there was a way of making that available retrospectively in a compact form, that would be useful. (Anil)

there's a lot of information, which is good. Unless one has a photographic memory, a lot of that information is then lost... maybe the one improvement might be if the wall projections could be emailed out in a form that makes them easy to print. (Geoffrey)

#### Sharing:

Suggest that people who participate in these courses form a support group. That they feel free to exchange with each other, particularly if they have similar or complementary projects. (Francesca)

How about if the pledges were shared? Anonymously. But if now, six months after the course, there was some sort of summary saying, "Following the course, this is what some of you have decided to do. Here are some ideas." (Jessica)

#### General advice:

Just enjoy. (Shirley)

Just talk about it more and [tell] everybody what you've done. (Imogen)  
Keep yourself open (Kate)

### 3. Key findings and recommendations

The teaching and the content of the course were praised by all participants and the sessions were perceived as being valuable in helping them choose pledges. Information on possible pledges (e.g. via 'Pledge for the Planet') was seen as particularly helpful.

#### Recommendation:

Consider using selected participant responses as an additional resource to help in the identification of pledges.

In terms of pledge selection, those already committed to reducing their carbon footprint were disadvantaged. Since there would seem to be little that can be done about this at the local level, it is something that may need to be addressed by the awarding organisation.

#### Recommendation:

Unless it is possible to resolve this issue at the local level (e.g. by identifying categories of project that would not disadvantage participants already working hard to reduce their carbon footprint), consideration should be given to approaching the Carbon Literacy Project with a view to allowing as a legitimate pledge the evaluation of current personal and/or group commitments and the identification of relevant issues, prospects for development, etc.

In terms of achievement some categories of pledge (e.g. those related to property or those that involved talking to others about climate) proved markedly less successful than others.

#### Recommendations:

Relevant findings from this analysis with respect to pledge selection should be made available to participants with a view to identifying pitfalls and raising awareness of the importance of scale and ambition.

Advice should be given to those considering talking to others about climate change one of their pledges. This might involve identifying the challenges posed and identifying useful resources on having climate change conversations, e.g.

<https://www.clientearth.org/media/jhifo1e2/clientearth-guide-to-having-climate-conversations.pdf>

The overwhelmingly positive response to the quality of teaching and of content on the course suggests that current practice should be continued and developed as appropriate. However, two recommendations from participants are worth considering.

#### Recommendations:

Key information should be made available to participants either online or in hard copy. It might be worth exploring with participants what the nature and extent of this should be.

Consideration should be given to facilitating contact between participants after the course with a view to promoting further development.

## Appendix: ChatGPT Analysis of Carbon Literacy interviews

### Instruction

ChatGPT was provided with a full transcript of the interviews and asked to identify relevant categories and populate these.

### Response

Based on the interviews you've provided regarding the Carbon Literacy Pledges, I've identified several relevant categories of response and populated them accordingly. Here's a summary:

Categories of Response:

#### 1 Decision-Making Process

- Personal Reflection: Many respondents chose pledges based on personal reflection about their current behaviors or interests. For example:
  - Miranda's experience with solar panels and community engagement was influenced by her existing commitments.
  - Alice chose pledges that differed from her previous courses, aiming for more impactful initiatives.
- External Influences: Some were prompted by external discussions or suggestions during the Carbon Literacy training sessions. For instance:
  - Anil felt that the training made him think of new ideas and led him to consider impact vs. practicality.

#### 2 Challenges Faced

- Identification of Pledges: Many struggled to find new pledges that didn't duplicate existing commitments:
  - Miranda felt stuck finding additional pledges due to already practicing many sustainability actions.
  - Anil faced difficulty in finding feasible personal pledges despite his existing commitments.
- Implementation Barriers: Issues such as costs, knowledge gaps, and time constraints were recurrent themes:
  - Miranda noted financial limits when considering installing solar panels.
  - Alice encountered confusion over solar panel quotes and the difficulty of evaluating long-term relationships with energy providers.

#### 3 Achieved vs. Unachieved Pledges

- Responses varied regarding the success of achieving pledges:
  - Jessica noted success in her personal pledge but expressed frustration over difficulties in her public pledge.
  - Miranda reported not achieving her solar panel goal but had learned valuable information and engaged with suppliers.
- Overall, many participants indicated that while not all pledges were fully achieved, they had made progress or set plans in place.

#### 4 Impact of Carbon Literacy Training

- Increased Awareness and Confidence: Respondents noted that their participation in training led to a greater understanding of carbon issues:
  - Many found the training reinforced their existing knowledge and led them to engage in discussions about sustainability.
  - Others reported enhanced confidence in discussing climate issues or making more conscious choices.
- Encouragement for Action: Several indicated that training positively influenced their commitment to sustainability, even if all pledges weren't fully realized:
  - Participants mentioned feeling empowered to make changes and advocate for climate issues outside the training setting.

#### 5 Community Engagement and Volunteering

- Many respondents highlighted the importance of community involvement:
  - Anil and Miranda discussed their commitments to volunteering and how they wish to engage broader communities.
  - Advanced pledges frequently led to invitations to facilitate local climate discussions or organize sustainability-related events.

#### 6 Future Steps and Recommendations

- Adaptation and Ongoing Commitment: The ambition to continue making pledges or adapting existing ones for future events was a repeated comment:
  - Many expressed interest in investigating further options, such as engaging local action or pursuing collaborative community events.
- Practical Advice: Suggestions included keeping pledges manageable, forming support networks, and being open to ongoing discussions about climate issues:
  - Participants emphasized the importance of sharing ideas and learning from one another in community or group settings.

#### Summary of Key Findings:

- Many of the pledges recognized and reflected existing habits, sometimes making it challenging for individuals to identify new actions to take.
- Financial constraints, time limitations, and existing knowledge (or lack thereof) were significant barriers impacting the implementation of pledges.
- Training was widely regarded as beneficial for increasing awareness and sparking conversations about sustainability across different community settings.
- A need for practical advice and simplified approaches to engaging with climate-related pledges was expressed.

Overall, the interviews revealed a complex interplay between personal willingness to make changes, external influences, and the realities of existing commitments. Participants showed enthusiasm for community engagement but faced practical challenges that varied significantly based on personal circumstances and local contexts.