

# **YOUR GUIDE TO HOSTING A LOCAL HUSTINGS EVENT ON CLIMATE AND NATURE**



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## Political engagement is crucial - now

The general election on 4th July will be era-defining for the environmental agenda. We are halfway through the crucial 'decade of delivery' to 2030, and vital legally-binding targets on climate and nature will be won or lost in the next Parliament. Now, more than ever, we need to raise the climate and nature crisis higher up the agenda and inspire our local politicians to take further, stronger action in defence of the things that matter most.

Communities across the UK are already taking action for a greener and fairer society - reducing local climate impacts and creating cleaner air, warmer homes, healthy food and improved wellbeing.

The 130 member organisations of The Climate Coalition, United for People, Climate and Nature, with memberships amounting to 20 million people, are leading the call for all political parties to step in alongside the communities of Britain. **It's time to show leadership to ensure nature can be restored and emissions will more than halve by 2030, and to provide support for the hardest hit communities at home and around the world to tackle the impacts of the climate crisis.**

**Organising a hustings is a great way to make this happen.**

Across the country other people like you are helping to demonstrate the strength and breadth of the public mandate for action on climate and nature as we head to the general election and into the first crucial months of a new parliament.





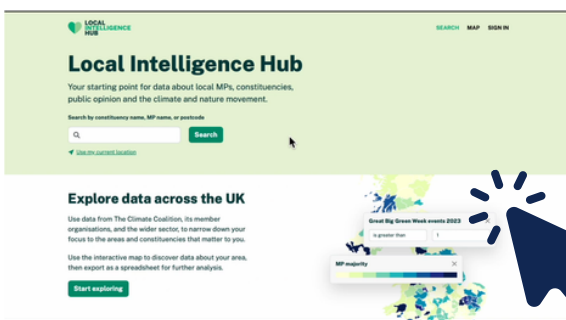
## What is a hustings?

A hustings is an event where candidates for an election debate their policies, positions, and election commitments and answer questions from the public. Any community group or organisation can organise an hustings.

Crucially, they can focus a national campaign normally centred on party leaders back onto local concerns, local questions, and local solutions. Usually, a hustings is completely open to the public, allowing a wide spectrum of opinion to join in and take part in discussion with those standing for election.

Holding a hustings event focused on the climate and nature crises, allows voters to hold their representatives to account on these topics. It makes it clear to the candidates that their constituents care deeply about these issues, and helps get climate change onto the agenda across the country. This vital part of elections improves the quality of democracy in the UK and creates vital opportunities for connection and commitments to local communities for candidates, which helps shape our politics after the election.

## How to find who your election candidates are?



The The Climate Coalition's [Local Intelligence Hub](#) is gathering information on all confirmed Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (shortened to candidates in this guide). You can manually search this database for your constituency and see which candidates are confirmed as standing for the general election.

If you need any help in your search for your local candidates, please get in touch.



## Organising a Hustings on Climate and Nature

**The general election will be on 4th July 2024.**

Hustings are valuable public events and any community group, charity or organisation (and different groups working together) can organise one. Now the election date is known, planning should start as soon as possible, so that you can contact candidates and arrange a venue ahead of time. Candidates are prepared for and welcome opportunities to set out their positions and hear the concerns and solutions to issues raised by the constituents they hope to serve.

### Top tips for your hustings event

- **Pick a venue.** This should be within the constituency and suitable for 30 - 100 people, but perhaps more if you are in a location that will attract large numbers. It should be accessible and have a space suited for the candidates to be seen by the audience. Depending on the size of the event, you may want to have microphones and the capacity to present visuals.
- **Register your hustings on the [United for People, Climate and Nature hub](#)** and take a look at other organisations on there to see if you could be working together.
- Use the **Local Intelligence Hub** to find groups you could work with and useful statistics you could use to frame your approach to candidates.
- **Contact the candidates.** Please check out the section in this guide on Impartiality Guidance and Practicalities for useful and important info on the [Electoral Commission guidelines](#).
- You might choose to hold the hustings for a larger area or across a city, inviting candidates standing in different constituencies, extending invites to candidates from different parties and any independent candidates.
- **Advertise your hustings.** You can do this through local groups, faith communities, newspapers and radio, social media etc and ask candidates to put the hustings on their website and social platforms. Your hustings will have more impact if the audience is really representative of your local community, so think carefully about how and where you could advertise it so it's seen by as many local people as possible. You may also wish to include a contact email address and to ask attendees to submit questions in advance so that you can choose a good range of topics.
- **Eventbrite (or similar)** is a useful free promotion and registration tool (used for events of all kinds) - see more info below.





## Agenda and structure

Whilst you can build your own structure to fit with your vision for the event, most hustings follow a similar format:

### Part One

Each candidate gets to introduce themselves, their core ideas, and those of their party. This could be around 5 minutes, but this could be changed to fit with the needs of the event.

### Part Two

Questions are asked by the Chair and the candidates are invited to respond and discuss. This could take around 30 minutes, but would depend on the framing and number of the questions.

### Part Three

The audience is invited to ask questions for the candidates, this could take up the rest of the event's time. The event information can include prompts for audience members to come prepared with questions.

Using a free event registration tool like on Eventbrite can give you an idea of how many people will be attending. You could give examples of good questions in the Eventbrite description, and invite people to submit questions in advance via the Eventbrite form. That way, you can make sure there are a variety of questions, covering a range of topics. Don't forget to log your event on the online United for People, Climate and Nature hub where you'll see people like you doing the same.

## Choosing an Appropriate Chair

You should select an independent Chair who aims to be as neutral as possible and does not have bias towards one particular party. They should be confident in speaking to an audience and guiding a discussion, ensuring it is respectful and on topic. This could be a local community leader, a local faith leader or teacher, yourself or a member of your group, or a local public figure. You might consider approaching someone who would bring greater attendance and diversity.



## Impartiality guidelines and practicalities

Hustings are important, positive and engaging activities in the run up to elections. The [Electoral Commission guidelines](#) help charities and other organisations hosting hustings events remain compliant with charity and electoral law. Their guidance is there to help anyone, and so are we.

It may be straightforward to invite all local candidates. Please do also note that it is possible to host a non-selective hustings event *without* inviting all candidates, if there is an *impartial reason* to do so.

Specifically the guidance suggests that: *“Impartial reasons may emerge from the following considerations:*

- *resources and other practicalities that limit the numbers you can invite, for example time or space*
- *security concerns*
- *local prominence of some parties or candidates over others*
- *the number of elected representatives at the local or national level*
- *recent election results in the area”*

*“If you decide not to invite all candidates for impartial reasons, there are some good practice recommendations you should follow if you want to ensure your hustings is genuinely not promoting particular candidates or parties more than others:*

- *Inform the audience at the meeting of any candidates or parties standing who haven't been invited*
- *Be prepared to explain your impartial reasons to candidates or parties you haven't invited*
- *Make sure that candidates or parties you invite represent a reasonable variety of view, from different parts of the political spectrum*
- *Allow each candidate or party representative attending a fair chance to answer questions and, where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other candidates or party representatives.”*

To reiterate - it's important that events associated with The Climate Coalition, and the United for People, Climate and Nature campaign developed by its members, that we do not give support, or appear to give support to a political party or candidate, or for or against a group of candidates. This applies to the planning, publicity and running of the event, and the follow up.







## Safety and security for all

A community-led hustings should be a safe place for lively debate.

One of the ways to set the tone for a positive, safe and inclusive event is to set clear expectations of behaviour from the start. Simple, clear info can be included in event invites, adverts and promotional messages. This can be reiterated by the Chair at the start with agreement from all attendees that there will be zero tolerance for rude or aggressive behaviours.

Though rare, sadly we have seen a rise in hostility and even threatening or violent behaviour towards politicians and public officials.

It is important that the safety of all attendees is considered. Please note that candidates who have been serving as an MP may have advice they need to adhere to regarding their security. This may be useful for everyone.

## Photography

A set of great images can help you as you follow up on your good work.

Prominent signage to say that photography will be happening and to alert organisers if you do not want to be in the photograph are sufficient for general views and it is good practice to ask for written consent for more identifying shots.

Images of children should never be taken without clear written consent from parents.



## Access arrangements

Consider what access arrangements you might need to have to ensure that everyone can take part. Perhaps a local university or college will host for free in a location with a hearing loop and level access etc, or support British Sign Language interpretation.





## Beyond the usual voices

**The public mandate for strong action on climate and nature is mainstream.**

The most successful hustings are planned to ensure that the attending candidates can see and hear that **climate and nature are concerns of a wide cross-section of the community.**

This takes careful planning and delivery - to get a wide range of the community there, to make sure their concerns are voiced and heard and that the candidates are accountable to the whole community.

## Some tips to build in a wide range of voices into your hustings

- Can your Chair and venue be selected to attract a diverse audience?
- Can you reach out to community groups to send representatives? Ask local businesses, voluntary organisations, youth groups, farmers, trade unions, sports clubs, and parents groups - you know your community and who may not always be heard on these issues.
- Use the [Local Intelligence Hub](#) - this is an ever-growing, free resource of local info, stats and insights - useful to equip people with more local info to ask good questions. You can also see who has signed the 'community letter' and get in touch!
- Could local schools / colleges source and present questions?
- Could there be specific roles for young people (especially first-time voters) - who have so much to gain and lose in the coming years? How can their voices be amplified?
- Starter questions - also on the hub - can be a great way to workshop ideas together.
- Personal experience and expertise is powerful. For example, a respiratory nurse asking when her patients will be able to breathe cleaner air, and if the candidates will ask a question in parliament or add it to their maiden speech.
- The Chair can make sure that there is space for all local voices by sensitively but firmly controlling the meeting.





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## Beyond the usual hustings...

There is room for creativity! You might want to consider whether you could run your event in a way that adds an extra local interest for the candidates, and the audience.

You might want to start with a short film or a performance - music, a song or poem etc. Or a presentation by local young people.

It's your event - you know your community and what would engage people.

Hosting a hustings in a setting in or close to nature can underline the importance and urgency of protecting nature. Similarly, hosting at a school reminds attendees what is at stake.

Conversely, in areas impacted by de-industrialisation a venue can spark discussion on change and what new green jobs could bring back to our communities.

## Getting your event on the Online Hub



[United for People, Climate and Nature hub](#)



The United for People, Climate and Nature online hub brings together resources to help you and your community engage with your political candidates and representatives - whether you want to run a local hustings, have meaningful conversations with your political candidates, or find other ways you can show you want to see action for people, climate and nature.

If you are planning to host a local hustings, be sure to register your event and it will be featured on our map of hustings taking place across the UK. People looking to attend a local hustings, or see what else is already happening in the local area will be able to see details of your event.



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## Inviting your candidates - an example email

Dear [NAME OF CANDIDATE],

On behalf of [NAME OF LOCAL GROUP/GROUPS] I am pleased to invite you as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate to our People, Climate and Nature hustings event at [VENUE INFO] on [DATE]. The event will start at [TIME] and finish at [TIME] promptly. I'm sure you'll already be very busy campaigning - this is an opportunity for you to address the issues that constituents raise to allow them to hear your answers alongside other candidates.

It is a venue with level access, hearing loop and designated disabled parking. Please let us know if you have any specific access requirements, or any further questions about the venue and plans for the evening. It is accessible by public transport on route [INFO].

We are planning for a non-selective hustings as outlined by the Electoral Commission. [HERE INCLUDE INFO ON WHO IS INVITED AND WHY - \*refer to the good practice bullet points in the section on Impartiality Guidelines and Practicalities\*]

There will be five minutes each given to candidates to make an opening statement. All candidates will of course be given equal opportunity to respond to questions.

We have invited local businesses, parents groups, trade unions and faith groups and we are delighted that our local school will open our event with a short performance of their drama that encourages us to think about what a greener future could look like. Year 6 have also been developing some challenging questions for our panel of candidates. Happily, we also have our local secondary school providing photographers for the event.

I hope you are able to attend and would appreciate it if you would be able to let me know by [DATE] whether that will be possible so that we can ensure political balance.

Best wishes,





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## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

At Hope for the Future (HFTF), we believe in the power of democratic engagement in calling for action on the climate and nature crisis.

We recognise that getting your voice heard with politicians and candidates can be a challenge.

That's why we're here to help. We are a climate communication and democratic engagement charity with 10 years of experience supporting people across the UK to build effective relationships with their local politicians to take action on climate change and nature.



We're delighted to be bringing you this guide with The Climate Coalition and are happy to hear from you if you would like some support in organising your event or working with your MP to follow up on commitments and support a productive ongoing relationship.

To find out more about Hope for the Future and our work you can visit our website at:

[www.hftf.org.uk](http://www.hftf.org.uk)





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## How Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis will put climate on the desk of incoming MPs



Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis (WinACC) works tirelessly with communities and organisations to fight climate change across the whole of the Winchester district. They have organised lots of hustings events and have tried various formats to maximise the political impact of their work.

In 2023, WinACC brought councillors from four political parties to a hustings event for the local elections in 2023. They were 'very pleased' at the responses from all four parties to the final question from WinACC's Chair, which asked them to commit to work together with the other parties in the City Council to 'agree on the most important climate actions', and 'not to use it as an opportunity for party politicking'. You can see how it went on [WinAcc's website](#).

This year WinACC tried a different model to engage politicians before an election which was a series of meetings for their membership with individual local politicians. WinACC found that they secured more detailed and considered answers from the politicians in this format, saw less political point scoring and gave a better opportunity for politicians to engage with their passionate and knowledgeable membership. It is an interesting approach which WinAcc found worked very well. Hope for the Future supported with research beforehand into the candidates and used it to develop questions for each candidate.

The WinACC experience demonstrates that both hustings events and individual meetings are engaging and effective.







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## Making connections, building the movement

Hustings events are an important way of building relationships with candidates and setting out a framework for holding them to account. Additionally, these community-led events help strengthen the local movement for action on climate change and protecting nature, building connections for future community events and campaigns.

The **United for People, Climate and Nature hub** can help in a number of ways. You can see what else is happening in your area including other groups you could connect with. You may decide to support another local event (rather than organise your own) and bring the approach outlined in this guide to that event.

Your group may look to partner on an event - perhaps jointly hosting with one of the organisations that signed our [Community Letter](#) - more information can be found on the [Local Intelligence Hub](#). Joining forces might bring a wider audience, as well as additional organisational capacity!

**[Find the United for People,  
Climate and Nature Hub here](#)** 



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## More support

Hustings are incredible opportunities to obtain strong commitments from your future MP which you can hold them to account on post-election. Speak to Hope for the Future's engagement team about holding your MP to account - contact [info@hftf.org.uk](mailto:info@hftf.org.uk)

