

Café conversation 12 February 2026 – things we can all do to tackle climate change

22 people attended our first conversation, including the organising group from A Greener Melrose.

Conversation

Recycling

Recycling habits over time – practice hasn't changed much over past few years but coop takes plastic that can't be recycled. Soft plastic recycling is possible in household waste as long as it's in a contained bag – but if we grew local food we wouldn't need to use so much soft plastic.

There are fewer fabric recycling locations now. Circular economy should be encouraged though.

Composting – council does not take household food waste or have green bins, but a private contractor will take garden waste and you can then buy mulch bags back to use. There are currently pilot areas through council for brown waste bins in 6 areas (Peebles, Tweedbank, Galashiels, poss Hawick, heavily populated areas). Needs a particular type of vehicle to collect, so there would be a capital expense to roll out the scheme further. An alternative solution may be crank wheel compost stations. Something we can deal with ourselves!

A role for greener Melrose in explaining recycling options in the local area. Could we set up a wiki that people could contribute to? Or maybe a less technical way.

Where can people find allotments – closest to Melrose is Lowood run by Abundant Borders, using a strip farming approach. Compost there is collected. Tweedbank allotments also has a hot bin, and there's the Drygrange plots.

Repair cafes – few and far between. Would like to see more of that here. Options available:

- The General Store on high street Selkirk does repairs. One person explained “I fix most things myself but for things I haven't been able to fix have been able to work with them”. They also have a tool library.
- Home basics in Walkerburn and Hawick take furniture but have strict guidelines and have limited space.
- Galashiels and Selkirk recycling centre have spaces to leave things that could be recycled or repaired.
- Village facebook sites help a lot with recycling of unwanted items, also freecycle.

Using Vinted is a change one person had made, and they were not buying new clothes as a result which takes the energy out of mass production, the app has really fantastic filters on the search. “You can have 5 misses and it's still worth your while”. “You can choose to buy clothes that are new with labels for £5-6.”

A theme through the chat on recycling was the exchange of information – use green map from SBCAN and circulate that.

Transport

One person was using the train a lot but still used a car to get to the station.

Having the train to Edinburgh is good but you can't get it everywhere, you can't get to Jedburgh etc. Bus by comparison is underused and underrated, but it's expensive if you don't have a bus pass. Those that have bus passes now use it to get to Edinburgh – but remember the noise cancelling headphones!

One person wondered about car sharing saying “many days I don't use my car because I work from home, but if I could put it into a car pool then others could use it”. Also, if you have a charging point at your house you could rent out use of it to other people – someone pointed out that there are schemes like Fuse where you can register your charger and have it open to the public and set whatever tariff you want. All chargers now have to be open charge protocol.

There's an electric car club in Hawick (run by Andy). Also, there are car sharing platforms like Airbnb for cars and car sharing apps that you can use to share journeys with people. There was talk about councils' electric fleets being available to citizens, it was meant to be straightforward for community members to use it. Not well known about though. [We could check on this?]

There are timing challenges around bus timetables at the train station. The problem is the interchange being in Gala, so that's where the link up with train and bus is meant to be and a lot of people don't realise that and go all the way to Tweedbank if they want to get to Melrose or further East assuming it's closer. Then, if Scotrail changes timetable the notice period is short and it takes the bus companies time to catch up with their own timetable changes. One person said though that a friend had found it worked really well to get off the bus at Gala to then get a bus to Selkirk.

With buses, there is a change in mindset needed when you switch to using them as you have to get used to planning ahead and not just being able to go out on the spot like you can with a car, but you get into it with time.

There is the challenge with Borders of rurality, some small towns are thinking about community buses. An example is Heriot which is now reliant on the X95 which is infrequent. The Pingo initiative in Berwickshire was tried (run by council) and suggestion was it wasn't ideal, but maybe a community owned grassroots initiative might be more successful.

At one point there was a plan to have renewables on village halls, and have charge points with them, and small lightweight cars and volunteer drivers in each village who could take people places. The feeling was that having the cars based in the small towns and villages rather than having them come from elsewhere would be what made the approach work.

Energy

One person had invested in changing their home rating from G to A: use a borehole, heat pump, solar, EV car – but it needed a lot of initial investment. The Place Plan for their village involved people thinking of heat and energy plans for the future, but those issues were not the priority, and the hurdles around setting up shared resources are great especially in small villages.

There is a compendium of possible schemes for the Borders, but none are going forward because of business models and regulatory systems challenging to navigate. Is there a role for an organisation like GM or sustainable borders to take on accelerating these transformations?

Same with co-housing, for any community based idea, there isn't the right systems in place. There are very few communities where these things happen. An example in England is Totness, and there has been success in some Scottish islands. Where you have people who are a community because of their lifestyle and values it can be possible to initiate shared initiatives, but communities that work like that are few and far between, and it's harder to do this in mainstream societies even though there are great opportunities to scale up.

Building companies are doing community heating in new schemes, but they control everything tightly. They tell you how much you have to pay, who has to maintain the systems etc. This typically means paying more and losing flexibility. People liked the idea of community initiatives, but the reality is that big companies mess things up. Energy schemes should be a community thing, not a business.

Important to remember that a lot of people in the borders live in housing schemes and/or don't have a lot of money. We have high rates of deprivation in the Borders, but if we don't do solutions that work for or help everyone, the impact limited and only available to the privileged.

It's also really challenging to do this work on old houses, especially in complex old houses without double glazing. Amazing how many properties you move into that don't have lagging on pipework. Buy insulation from local builders merchant and do it yourself. [Perhaps a tips and tricks space might be useful on our website, but do we want to keep things to local information?]

There's a £15bn scheme in April where difficult houses can be addressed. But if you try to use these schemes, choose the company doing the work carefully. Also, be clear about how UK government funding applies in Scotland.

The community should be the middleman and be the person that gets schemes together and tackles the hurdles. There is a disconnect coming from the controls in business-run schemes about limiting what the energy is used for. Ideally it should be that you would have a community solar farm, a community battery. Borders Community Action open to helping and setting up groups. There are villages like West Linton, Fintree, and others who have managed community setups like solar that can be used as examples.

We need to think about what system we're using to create and run initiatives like this. Ideal scenario is that everyone is on the inside – everyone invests, everyone gets money back, everyone is putting aside funding to replace. There is more resilience when you have a network of things, with communities supporting each other – that would allow us to unplug from the exploitative systems that we're tied to. It would also transform regulatory systems.

It's inspiring to hear how much individuals are able to research and put in innovations for living in a more environmentally friendly way. But it shouldn't be so hard, it shouldn't be just for those who have the time, the intellect or the money to be able to make that a reality for themselves. Where there are intermediaries like BCA or AGM that's really encouraging. Living in an environmentally friendly way should be an entitlement open to everyone.

A large number of people living in borders lived in terraced houses. Schemes for borders should focus on where people live, issues like limited opportunities for EV charging, house modifications. Houses close together lend themselves to community heating systems.

Should the council's placemaking programme be promoting that kind of action?

Yvan summing up

There's a lot of small things that we're already doing that we could do more of – transport, energy and food.

A key thread through the night was the role of intermediaries in helping individuals to make the right decisions – having more of these intermediaries, or considering what kind of intermediary services we might be able to provide.

Much of the discussion was systemic, but it also raised the deep cultural issue that we are not communities, we are individuals. We don't like to have to depend on companies. Do we try to help change that culture, is that our role as AGM, or do we find a way to accommodate that we are very independent beings in western societies?

