# Promoting discussions about local climate jobs

The first thing to say is that there is no one blueprint. It may well be that there has been quite a lot of work done on this in your area, perhaps by done by the council, perhaps by a local environmental group, or perhaps by trade unionists. These notes draw on the experiences in Sheffield, in particular, and Birmingham and Derby.

## Running a Local Jobs Petition

Having been inspired by the Million Climate Jobs campaign and the notion of building a broad based alliance climate and trade union activists in Sheffield they thought that running a petition around the issue of local climate jobs was a good way to publicise raise the Jobs and climate issue with the general public, focusing in particular upon the council. It was decided to call for 10, 000 local jobs, based on Sheffield having around 1% of the country’s population and comparing this with the national million jobs call. The plan then was to present the petition to the City Council at one of their meetings; raising over 5000 signatures could trigger a 40 minute debate on the issue.

There are various, lesser actions taken on smaller petitions depending how many people have signed them.

**Wording and Collecting Signatures:** A petition is a good way to engage people that may not normally consider the issues raised. They can show a degree of support by signing, without much effort. So a few prominent words should say what it is about, in case this is all that they read. The Sheffield petition was headed “Sheffield Climate Alliance: Petition for 10,000 Climate Jobs in Sheffield”. This was followed with a few bullet-points describing how climate change is also an economic and social issue, followed by an explanation of what climate jobs are. A separate sheet with more detailed information was kept on hand for those that wanted to know more. In practice, the petitioners developed a “sales patter”, often telling people what it is about, rather than them having to read it. They were often asked how the Council can provide this many jobs and they have to accept they cannot do this directly - but the Council can act to move the City towards this target.

In Sheffield they also ran a complimentary e-petition. This allowed them to collect signatures from people from their e-mailing list. Organisations could easily forward the petition to their e-mailing lists as well. It is important to have someone with the technical expertise to set up the petition links etc if this is to work properly.

**Spreading the Word:** Asking people to take copies of the petition is one way of spreading the word. Another is getting letters in the paper. (Tip: sometimes it is easier to get a letter in the paper than a press release). Here is an extract of that in the Sheffield Star announcing a meeting last June.

*Having bailed out the bankers to the tune of £1.3 trillion, the government tells us we have to make huge cuts in our public services to pay for it. But we need a massive investment in climate jobs and services to avert the threat of catastrophic climate change. In Sheffield, there is a steel industry that could easily produce renewable energy equipment such as wind turbines. We need to radically improve local bus services so more people use them again. Improving the energy efficiency of homes and buildings is labour intensive. All these areas could provide employment for many local people.*

## Public meeting.

That letter was also tied into organising a public meeting, aimed at TU members. In Sheffield they contacted as many UNIONS as they could, mainly using existing personal contacts and also Sheffield Anti-cuts Alliance and the Right to Work Campaign. They felt they had to work hard to get the interest of Union members. 23 people went to that Climate Jobs meeting last July , but they have had other meetings around the theme.

If you have the time and enthusiasm to organise it, a public meeting is worthwhile, perhaps including a showing of the One Million Climate Jobs Now! “DVD (10 minute versions). Contact the local media (perhaps with a letter to announce your meeting). Book appointments to see local councillors. If they are supportive, explore what action they can take within the local Council. If you have already have had one such meeting you may want to try other angles, perhaps involving some of the firms and businesses.

## Having a debate at the Council meeting

In Sheffield they never managed to obtain the 5,000 signatures and were thereby unable to force the 40 minute debate in the Council. Nevertheless the campaigners presented the 2 587 signature petition to a Full SCC Meeting in December. One of the campaigners gave a 3 minute intro plus campaigners asked questions from public gallery. In Derby any member of the public who lives within the area public can put a question and force an answer from the council, and then the questioner can make a supplementary point. While this is quite effective it does not allow other members to the public to engage. However a question backed by a petition carries a lot more weight, and is more likely to obtain media coverage.

## Moving beyond the usual suspects.

In Sheffield the campaigners have since been referred to the SCC Scrutiny Board where the campaigners presented evidence which led to a positive debate among the Officers and Councillors. They also went to a meeting designed to lead to an input into the Sheffield Economic Masterplan, which is largely Council led. As discussions continued with the Council, specific areas did start to be identified, such as the council generating renewable energy locally. The campaigners also started to make links with some of the local employers who are members of the low carbon subgroup. There are a number of businesses which are systematically promote a low-carbon agenda and are trying to educate their workforce and/or members of the public.

In Derby one person responded to the idea of a climate jobs meeting with this words:

*I’m very wary of anything that sounds like a “Give us a job” mentality, because I think it fosters dependency, is outdated and inappropriate in dealing with today’s issues and we don’t want to be labelled with the sad but convenient political labels of the past. That said, I’m hugely sympathetic to and supportive of creating new livelihoods and ethical (triple-bottom line) enterprises around the opportunities that the unprecedented confluence of climate change and resource depletion present.... The million climate jobs report does indeed have much merit:*

It is fascinating how one camp can perceive another. The Jobs and Climate Alliance set out to draw in trade unionists but, perhaps not at the same time, it tries to draw in local employers, and people from the council, who are keen to explore the green agenda.

## Birmingham and the Energy Savers project

Friends of the Earth in Birmingham had a general meeting on the economy and employment – not their usual thing – and more than 100 people turned up (admittedly it was the day before the budget). Their meeting had speakers (from the New Economics Foundation) exploring the Keynesian alternative to unemployment and called for the control of the banks. Interestingly there were no trade union speakers on the platform, but there were people who had been involved in the Birmingham Energy Savers project, a five-year project led by Birmingham City Council, which aims to improve energy efficiency, provide renewable energy and boost the local economy in the process. Management of the scheme has created five jobs within the council itself. Energy- saving measures are installed and maintained in Birmingham homes by qualified staff. The scheme works with local companies to create jobs and apprenticeships for manufacture, installation and maintenance of technology such as solar panels on roofs.