

COP26 and a View from Northern Ireland

Climate NI is proud to bring you a short summary of the COP26 conference, followed by 'A View from Northern Ireland,' by Stephen Jones (Climate NI), Cathy Burns (Derry City and Strabane District Council) and the Climate Unit in Belfast City Council.

What happened in Glasgow?

That COP26 would happen at all, was not certain earlier in 2021. 197 states eventually agreed on the Glasgow Climate Pact, leading on from the Paris Agreement in 2015. The Glasgow Climate Pact:

- “requests” that countries “revisit and strengthen” their climate pledges by the end of 2022.
- calls for a “phasedown” of unabated coal and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.
- sets up processes towards delivering a global goal on adaptation, higher levels of climate finance and finance for loss and damage.
- “recognises” that the impacts of climate change will be “much lower” at 1.5C compared with 2C and “resolves to pursue efforts” to stay under the lower limit.



Yet the success or failure of the negotiations may only become clear in the next 12 months to two years. 1.5C is alive... “but its pulse is weak,” admitted COP26 President Alok Sharma.

The UK presidency now needs to work hard to push for huge cuts in 2030 emissions pledges and significant gains in finance over the year ahead. The goodwill that vulnerable nations showed to agree to the Glasgow Climate Pact is less likely to repeat next year, should promises made at COP26 not be kept.

Real World Impacts

In real terms, another year of global emissions rises has not been halted. Current 2030 pledges leave double as much CO2 in the atmosphere as is required to keep warming to the Paris Agreement goal of 1.5C. Christian Aid states that even at that temperature, an average of [13% of annual GDP will be lost to climate damages in the poorest countries](#). If the world’s temperature rise reaches 2°C, the Met Office estimates that the number of people living in areas affected by extreme heat stress will [rise from 68 million today, to around one billion](#). Given these projections, activists rightly state that the world can scarcely afford to wait for another year of dialogue.

However, other commentators, focused more on the COP process itself, point out that COP26 was never supposed to single-handedly finalise 2030 targets. They say setting a roadmap for pledges in line with a 1.5C world next year, rather than in 5 years, is a positive step.

Positive Ambition and Side Deals

Other positive development from COP26 include:

(For the most comprehensive analysis of COP26, see Carbon Brief's detailed breakdown - [here](#))

- 90% of world economy is now under a net-zero goal.
- Huge parts of the Paris Agreement are now agreed and underway.
- The first appearance of fossil fuels in the text sends powerful market signals for renewables across the globe (a partnership on a just energy transition away from coal in South Africa sets a particularly positive precedent).
- For the first time there is recognition of the need for “loss and damage” compensation for the most vulnerable nations, but this “dialogue” must yield concrete results, or this issue alone may break the chance of any future deal.
- A range of side deals which emerged for the first time, including 2030 ambitions from country partnerships on Methane cuts, Deforestation, Hydrogen, Transport, Steel and Clean Energy.

Politicians are now being squeezed from both sides, by citizens and business; and media coverage should leave some legacy of knowledge with the British and Irish public. But promises from developed nations must now become action. By November 2022 we should have a better idea of whether the COP process itself has any power to deliver the real-world action needed.

“This is the COP we should have had 20 years ago,” - Chris Stark, UK Climate Change Committee.



Adaptation and Finance

A boost in finance and awareness of Climate Adaptation was one of the biggest successes of COP26. In fact, the Egyptian Presidency for COP27 have already named it as the core theme. The Glasgow Climate Pact includes an unprecedented goal for developed countries to double the funding provided to developing countries for adaptation by 2025, taking the annual figure to around US \$40 billion.

A range of adaptation initiatives were also launched at COP26, including:

- [Global Resilience Index Initiative](#) - a “globally consistent model for the assessment of resilience across all sectors and geographies. It will be a curated, open-source resource offering high level metrics across the built environment, infrastructure, agriculture and societal exposures with many potential applications in aggregated risk management worldwide.”
- [Adaptation Research Alliance](#) – “a group of over 90 organisations from 30 economies driving research and innovation for adaptation that strengthens resilience where it is needed most.”

‘Nature-based solutions’ did not make it into the final text, however, the Glasgow Climate Pact recognised the critical role of “restoring nature and ecosystems in delivering benefits for climate adaptation.”

And the UK government announced that “88 countries are now covered by Adaptation Communications or National Adaptation Plans to increase preparedness to climate risks, with 38 published in the last year.”

For a full breakdown of adaptation outcomes at COP26, see [here](#).

Local Government and Finance

The core message from local government was that national delegations are behind the curve, and much of the innovation is happening at a local level. Indeed, the final Glasgow Climate Pact recognises *“the important role of indigenous peoples, local communities and civil society, including youth and children, in addressing and responding to climate change, and [highlights] the urgent need for multilevel and cooperative action.”*

It also *“Urges Parties to further integrate adaptation into local, national and regional planning.”*

A new partnership of 12 UK Core Cities (including Belfast), estimates that it will require £200 billion to reach net zero. This is achievable, given that investment in the global system numbers in the trillions, but it means that new models and blends of finance must be developed. A range of new alliances, models and reports are under development to facilitate that shift, from a [Cities Climate Gap Fund](#) to bypass financial roadblocks and provide a central pot of money for cities to draw from, to the [Cities Climate Finance Alliance](#).

A View from Northern Ireland

- Stephen Jones, Resilience Coordinator, Climate NI

COP26 did feel like a more muted affair than my last COP in Paris 2015. However, it is clear that the global conversation has moved on. In 2015, most communities, business and local government were crying out for solutions from their national representatives. In 2021, those same actors are now clearly leading the way in innovation, collaboration and action. Tired of waiting, they now simply need national politicians to stop slowing them down. This is the same dynamic we see playing out in NI over the Climate Bill, and the biggest takeaway was how fast the rest of the world is moving ahead. Northern Ireland literally needs to get its act together.

There were many personal highlights even before I got to Glasgow, working with NILGA to facilitate councils and emergency planning groups to collaborate for 'Adaptation Day' (8th November) in [events right across NI](#), to a combined audience of more than 1000 people online and in-person.

At COP26 itself, it was a privilege to lead a session showcasing the great partnerships underway in local government across NI. When actors as diverse as extinction rebellion and multi-national corporations both have positive feedback for the same session, it tells me that a focus on solutions, leadership and working together, is the right way to push action forward for everyone.



- Watch the session from COP26 - [All Together Now: Collaboration for Local Climate Action in Northern Ireland](#)

It was a pleasure to meet activists of all ages in Glasgow, and to hear their passion on issues from local food to international finance. My last stop before heading home was a show by Armagh Planetarium called 'Our Place in the Cosmos.' A reminder if ever it was needed, of the wonder of this planet, and that the stability we take for granted is very fine balance indeed.

- Cathy Burns, Climate Programme Manager, Derry City & Strabane District Council

The weeks preceding COP26 were a busy time for Council and included a visit to the Guildhall from the Zero Carbon Bus Tour, which encouraged businesses to sign up to the Race to Zero, as well as Resilience Roadshows in Derry and Strabane, providing tips on being prepared for severe weather events and energy saving.

Council delegations went along to Glasgow, including the Mayor Alderman Graham Warke, along with Council's Sustainable Food Places Coordinator and Natural Environment Regeneration Manager, who attended the launch event of the Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration. I joined COP26 during week 2 of the conference and had the opportunity to present alongside Climate NI and NILGA. Our session outlined the importance of working together to deliver effective climate action across Northern Ireland.

As this was my first time at a COP, I wasn't sure what to expect, but it was a privilege to go along and experience the events and protests and exhibitions. The Green Zone exhibits were useful in

providing insight into new and emerging technologies, however from a practical council climate action perspective the numerous side events and networks were more valuable. These were held in universities, churches and community spaces and provided fantastic insight into critical climate change issues. Topics included climate change and mental health, toolkits for community climate action, carbon calculations and budgets, sustainable technologies, sustainable food systems, economics, wellbeing, and green infrastructure.

Although there is some disappointment at the official progress made at COP26, it is clear to me that huge strides are being made at local levels around the world, much of which we can learn from and build upon to maintain our own progress here in Northern Ireland.

- **The Climate Unit, Belfast City Council**

Cities are leading the way. More than 1000 have pledged to reduce emissions by 2030 and Councils are the closest level of government to communities, workers, suppliers and consumers, which means they are well placed to deliver holistic, tangible, large scale solutions.

There is a really compelling economic case for climate action in Belfast. If we invest £180m each year through to 2030, we can reduce our energy bills by £264m annually. However, this requires a significant upfront investment to transition at pace and at scale, so we need new financial models. This will require building alliances between central and local government on key areas including climate finance, sustainable transport, waste and circular economy, renewable energy and energy efficiency, and we have a real opportunity to use climate action to address multiple challenges.

People don't always feel part of the conversation, and that they are 'being talked above', so climate action must be done with rather than for residents, and young people are our most persuasive advocates for action.

Belfast sent a delegation to COP26 including the Lord Mayor Kate Nicholl, Councillors Brian Smyth and Aine Groogan, and Climate Commissioner Debbie Caldwell, who represented the City at a range of events in the Blue Zone and Green Zone at COP26, and beyond. During this time the council was also involved in side events, for example:

- An event on Nature and Play organised by Resilient Cities Network, as one of 8 ambassador cities in the Real Play Coalition. It reinforced the importance of linking different agendas to achieve big city outcomes like climate, regeneration and youth development.
- 'Adaptation Day' webinar on climate and nature which was hosted by Barra Best – Annika Clements from Ulster Wildlife focused on blue carbon, and we are following up on that to explore the potential for projects in the Belfast area, linking in with Belfast Harbour.
- Belfast Climate Commission Youth Summit on 'Youth Day', which was very successful and allowed young people to speak directly to the Minister for Infrastructure, Belfast Lord Mayor, and the NI Commissioner for Children and Youth. The young people drew on evidence from a survey they had conducted in September which received 1200 responses. We're meeting with the young people in the next few weeks to agree next steps.

Our next steps are to make good on our campaign commitments; ramping up our ambition and ability to take action quickly, learning from other cities, developing a city adaptation and mitigation plan in 2022, exploiting opportunities to attract place-based finance, and engaging young people.