

Great Big Green Week 2021: Getting your MP Involved

THE GREAT
BIG GREEN
WEEK 



Who are Hope for the Future?

The team at Hope for the Future (HFTF) exists to support you in building an effective relationship with your elected representatives leading to action on climate change. We deliver and develop training and resources on how to have effective and compassionate conversations with Members of Parliament (MPs) about climate change. Our relationship-based approach is grounded in eight years of research and first-hand experience, drawing on climate communications research, influencing theory, counselling techniques and advice from MPs themselves.

What is covered in this resource?

The purpose of this resource is to provide you with the tools and techniques to engage with your MP in the lead up to, and during, the Climate Coalition's Great Big Green Week in September 2021. The resource will cover:

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This resource is only one piece of the puzzle, and our team would love to support you, your friends and family, your community groups and wider networks to engage your MP. If you're using this resource to contact your MP, invite them to an event, or arrange a meeting, we'd love to hear from you at info@hftf.org.uk.

HFTF will also be running training workshops in effective MP engagement in the lead up to the Great Big Green Week. They will be advertised closer to the time so keep an eye out. We'd love to see you there!

Why engage your MP as part of Great Big Green Week?

The Great Big Green Week is a week-long climate festival taking place from 18th-26th September 2021. Local events will take place all over the UK involving many different people, all passionate about tackling climate change. Not only will the festival dominate the media, but it will also help influence and inspire elected representatives to take action and compel MPs to advocate for a particular area in their Parliamentary work. The Great Big Green Week is taking place just two months ahead of COP26, the annual UN climate change conference which this year is taking place in the UK, so this is a great opportunity to create an open dialogue about climate change with your MP.

Contacting your MP



You can get involved in the Great Big Green Week by inviting your MP to an event or arranging a meeting with your MP. A meeting with your MP prior to the Great Big Green Week is a chance to tell them about all of the week's activities and how much community support there is for local climate action inspiring them to get involved. Their involvement in the Great Big Green Week is an opportunity to get climate change higher up their agenda ahead of COP26.

Researching your MP

It is important to make all of your MP interactions, whether that be a letter, a meeting, or inviting them to an event, as personal as possible. To do so, we recommend researching your MP to find out what might be important to them. Below are some tips on how to do so.

- **Theyworkforyou.com** gives you an overview of your MP's parliamentary activity including their voting record. To find out your MP's priorities regarding climate change, you can look at which debates they attend and search for keywords in speeches that they have made
- To see if they have submitted any written questions regarding climate change, you can check **the UK Parliament website**
- Issues that are prominent in the local area are more likely to motivate or already be important to your MP, you should be able to find out which local issues your MP has been focusing on at their website
- It is useful to know if your MP is a backbencher or Minister, as Ministers may have more influence than backbenchers, but are limited in what they can speak on. You can find this **the UK Parliament website**
- Knowing whether your MP sits in a safe or marginal seat may indicate how willing to take risks they are. MPs in a marginal seat will feel more pressure to keep all of their constituents on side in order to maintain their job at the next election. This can be found on the **House of Commons constituency dashboard**
- Your MP's professional background may also be useful in deciding what issues to focus on. This will be available online on either your MP's website or in the local press. For example, if your MP has a background in finance, they may be more receptive to the economic benefits of climate action
- You can also have a look at what your local council is doing and whether they have plans and strategies related to local engagement and action on climate change.

Don't be afraid to mention this information to your MP in your meeting as it will show them that you have taken the time to do your research. If this feels a bit daunting, we are on hand to assist or undertake research for you. Just get in touch with the team at **info@hftf.org.uk**.

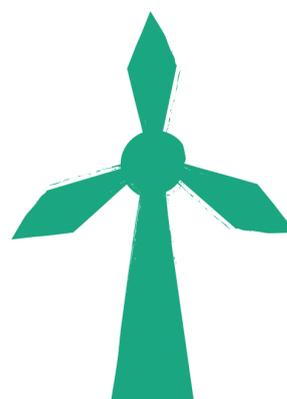
Getting in touch with your MP

Once you've researched your MP, you should have a good idea of where you can find common ground with them. When planning an event as part of the Great Big Green Week, it may be that you choose to focus your event on a topic that's of interest to your MP. Examples of these topics could be: nature and biodiversity; housing energy efficiency; renewable energy; travel and transport; or flood defences. If you're struggling to think of a topic or to find an area of common ground with your MP, get in touch with the HFTF team at info@hftf.org.uk.

Once you have done your research, you're now ready write to your MP. Advice for inviting your MP to an event is covered later in this resource. You may like to email your MP or send them a letter in the post. We have found that handwritten letters often get the best response, but this may depend on your MP. If you decide to send an email, we would recommend attaching a formal letter to your email as a PDF alongside the body of your email. You can find your MP's contact details on the [UK Parliament website](#).

Remember to use your research to personalise your letter. Including a thank you for their recent work is a great way to begin building a positive relationship with your MP. Find a suggested outline for your letter on the next page.

As with any stage in this process, we can give you guidance and support in writing your letter, please contact us at info@hftf.org.uk.



General letter outline

Your name and address

Full name

Re: Meeting/Event Request: [the main focus of the conversation]

- Include this to ensure the main aim of the letter is clear

Introduction

- Include a short introduction to yourself, climate change, and why the issue is important to you
- Thank them for something they have already done that you appreciate and acknowledge the pressure that MPs are under at this time
- Explain why you are getting involved in the Great Big Green Week, why you are interested in speaking with your MP to discuss climate change issues or why you think your MP should attend your event. If possible, tailor this section to your local area, and discuss some ways you feel climate change affects you locally

Main topic

- Provide some context to show some understanding and ensure you mention the local aspect. If your ask is to invite your MP to your Great Big Green Week Event, talk more about the theme of your event. How does the theme i.e. food waste or sustainable transport link to your constituency or your MP's interests
- Begin to discuss your focus of the letter. Consider if the framing you have decided is appropriate for your MP

Your ask

- Let them know you wish to meet them, or that you are inviting them to attend an event as part of the Great Big Green Week

Signing off

- Highlight the importance of the climate crisis to you
- Yours Sincerely is appropriate when signing off as the recipient is named.

Things to keep in mind for your letter

TREACLE is a helpful acronym to guide you in writing your letter in a way that will resonate with your MP.

- **Tone** - keep your tone collaborative and receptive
- **Remember MPs are generalists** - they tend to know a little about a lot. Don't assume that they know the ins and outs of climate science so breaking the issue down can be really beneficial. Even better, try and make the issue resonate with your local area
- **Empathy** - recognise the demands of your MPs job. They have little free time so ensuring our asks clear and thought through is important
- **Appreciate** - let them know the things you appreciate that they've done. This could be something they've spoken on in parliament, or an action they've taken locally
- **Common ground** - hone in on an issue you both care about. Use your research to identify an area of common ground
- **Length** - keep points concise and focused, your letter should ideally be no more than a page long
- **End** clearly with your request.

Things to avoid in your letter

PLATE is another acronym to inform you of the sort of language we suggest avoiding, to keep the discourse as positive as possible.

- **Political positions** - do not attack an MP's party or beliefs
- **Length** - avoid tangents and rambling
- **Asks** - do not hone in on a controversial issue
- **Tone** - avoid a cynical, rude or irritated tone
- **Exposing** - a knowledge gap deliberately is unhelpful.

Although you may disagree with your MP or you may be making a good argument, this is not an effective way of convincing your MP to take action. It is important to be polite and to the point.

Preparing to engage your MP

We know many people are unsure about how worthwhile contacting their MP will be, and many feel daunted by the prospect of doing so. That's why Hope for the Future exists – we can support you through the entire process, and use our experience of previous meetings to make your engagement as meaningful as possible.

Although people are often apprehensive about meeting their MP initially, people are universally enthusiastic about the experience afterwards. Ultimately, MPs are just people tasked with serving the areas they represent. Meeting constituents who are passionate about a particular area, and who are clear on how their MP can help, is a real highlight of an MP's job!

The email inboxes of MPs often get swamped by batches of campaign emails saying similar things. While this can helpfully indicate to an MP a strength of feeling about a particular issue, they usually don't have time to be able to respond meaningfully. **Meeting your MP allows you to have a dialogue rather than just a one-way exchange.** It is a much more 'human' interaction and is therefore a much more meaningful way to engage politically. In the same way, inviting your MP to an event generates a community dialogue between an MP and their constituents.



Gather a group

Meeting an MP, or planning an event, as representatives of a group can help your MP engagement be as effective as possible.

If you're planning an MP meeting as part of Great Big Green Week, we find that a group of 2-5 people is best - it allows you to have a clear and focused meeting which can become harder with larger groups, while also allowing a variety of perspectives and avoiding overwhelming your MP. We advise allocating someone to record notes whilst the others lead the conversation.

You should always let your MP's office know how many people will be attending in advance. Also, consider who you are representing and let your MP know; within your group there may be different ages and political persuasions so this provides an MP with a broader representation of their constituents. The same goes for inviting your MP to an event.



Preparing your 'ask' in 3 steps

An 'ask' is what exactly you are asking your MP to do. Some examples of appropriate requests to ask of your MP include attending an event, suggesting a campaign area for your MP to get involved in, or writing to a minister. Having a defined, specific and achievable 'ask' will mean that your MP is much more likely to take action.

1 - Choose your focus

To ensure you can talk in detail, it is best to pick one specific topic to be the focus of either your event or your short meeting with your MP. You should decide which issue you want to focus on with your MP. This could be local air pollution, or improving active transport infrastructure, or any other climate issue you are passionate about. Whilst deciding this, it is important to consider which issues you may have common ground with your MP on.

As part of the Great Big Green Week, your ask may be inviting your MP to speak at a local event, open a community garden or write a media piece on climate change.

2 - Think about framing

Next you should think about how to frame your focus around values your MP already holds.

Some MPs will be motivated by leading the way with technological and scientific expertise required by the climate crisis. Other MPs may be motivated by the concept of working towards a 'just transition', green jobs and sustainable finance, and others motivated by pursuing policies of 'climate justice'. We are on hand to help you research your MP and suggest the best ways to frame what you want to talk about.



3 - Set your 'asks'

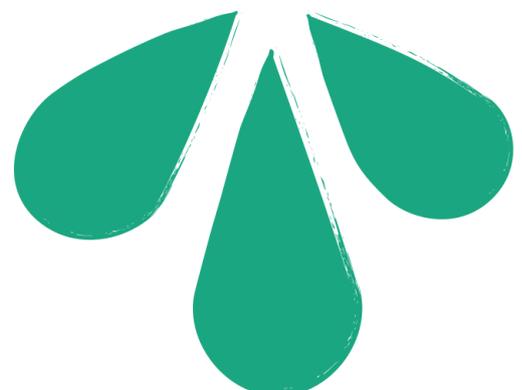
Next, you need to prepare what you are going to ask your MP to take action on. As part of the Great Big Green Week, this may be inviting your MP to attend an event, or you may wish to meet your MP to discuss climate change more generally. Either way, your 'ask' needs to be realistic and should be considerate of your MP's previous interest and expertise about climate change. MPs with little of either should be presented with less ambitious 'asks'.

Your 'ask' should be SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Timely

If you are arranging an event and inviting your MP, having an 'ask' as one of the event's key objectives can help to provide a strong direction to your event. For example, if you invite your MP to visit a local wildlife site, when you thank them for attending, you could ask them to support stronger policy on nature conservation such as a 2030 nature recovery target.

Choosing your 'ask' can be challenging so feel free to get in touch at info@hftf.org.uk for further guidance.



Below are some suggestions of asks applicable for most MPs as part of Great Big Green Week. We have most success with asks that are grounded in the local area so think about how your issue might impact your local community. Some examples of SMART asks include asking your MP to...

- Speak at a local constituency event on your chosen topic
- Attend and speak at an upcoming debate in Parliament
- Join a relevant All Party Parliamentary Group
- Add information on local climate action to their website
- Coordinate local action (e.g. Olivia Blake, Labour MP for Sheffield Hallam is holding regular zoom meetings of constituents to draw up a constituency climate manifesto).

You may choose to raise COP26 with your MP as part of the Great Big Green Week. You can find more advice and guidance on meeting your MP in the lead up to COP26 in our resource available on our website: www.hfff.org.uk/campaigner-workbooks.

Meeting preparation

Practice a one-minute opener explaining who you are representing, the reason for your meeting and what you are asking of your MP.

Consider how you could make the meeting memorable. Could you make it part of an event your MP is invited to? Can you think about ways the meeting could be shared on social media? Could you do a write-up of your meeting for your bulletin or community magazine (in which case, ask the MP to provide a quote)?

Tips for your meeting

- You will likely only have around 20 minutes for the meeting with your MP, so don't expect to cover a lot of ground and try to stay on topic
- Although your first meeting may not be perfect, try to view it as an opportunity for dialogue with your MP. Ensure you mention your concerns about climate change and try to include at least one of your asks. Express that you would like to continue the conversation
- Although your MP may be open to talking about climate, they may not actually know much about climate policy, or not have made some of the links to other risks of climate change such as UK poverty, health issues etc. Use this as an opportunity to inform them of these issues without exposing their knowledge gap
- When communicating with an MP, be careful not to use language that could be deemed as subverting democracy (e.g. 'we do not have the time to follow ordinary political processes'). MPs may not respond well to this and it may cause a defensive response
- Instead you should try to use positive language, such as talk of global leadership, aspiration, and the UK's expertise
- If appropriate, mention ways other MPs (preferably of the same political party as your MP) that are working well in Parliament on this issue
- If you feel that it would be helpful to have support during your meeting, a member of the Hope for the Future team can dial in to the video call with you. Just get in touch to let us know if this would be helpful.

Following up

So what's next? After your meeting or event you should create an action plan to ensure that all of the agreed upon actions by the MP do happen. Once you've met with your MP, it is important to follow up! We find the best way to effect change is multiple engagements. Follow our sign-posts for communicating with your MP post meeting below:

- Within 1 week - Email your MP to thank them for their time and recap of all of the agreed action points. This way all the actions are down on paper and can be referred to at a later date. Attach any photos if you've taken any
- 1 month - Follow up to check if your MP has completed their agreed action points within your agreed time frame
- 1 - 3 months - You should check in on your MP's parliamentary appearances and actions. Ensure you keep in touch with your MP, to continue to build that positive relationship. We also encourage you to send them updates where relevant
- 3 - 6 months - Organise to meet with your MP again, you could invite them to an event, or work with them on a media piece.

We understand that this can be a long and difficult process; MPs may be busy or bad at getting back to their constituents. If you don't receive a reply to your follow up letter, it may be necessary resend it with a note saying that you are following up because you have had no response.

We have seen how rewarding it is when you have a good engagement with your MP, so don't give up!

Finally, please get in touch with us to give feedback on your experience and discuss how to take your engagement further by emailing info@hftf.org.uk.

Inviting your MP to your event

Inviting your MP to an event as part of Great Big Green Week is a great way to engage with them, and a good sized audience demonstrates that there is a local mandate for action on climate change in their constituency. It will offer publicity for both your MP and your cause and begin to build a positive relationship.

Before you think about inviting your MP, your event planning should be underway, and preferably in the final stages. You can read more about planning an event for the Great Big Green Week on **The Climate Coalition Website**.

You can invite your MP to an event in a similar manner as you would ask for a meeting; with a letter. Our template letters for inviting an MP to an event can be found at [our website](#).

Use the steps from this resource to make this letter as personal as possible for the best results.

How you frame your invitation should also be specific to each MP. You should take into account the values and interests of each MP you invite to do this. It would also be useful to try to frame the event around local issues wherever possible. Although the basis of the event may be nationwide you could still consider how to make the event specific to problems within your constituency.

Tips for inviting Your MP to an event

- Ensure that the invitation for each MP comes from someone, or a group of people, within their constituency
- Invite your MP as soon as you have decided on the focus and format of your event, as the date and time will likely be guided by their schedule. You should provide a couple of dates and times to your MP, which work for your local group, your venue (if applicable) and any speakers or other guests you may be inviting
- Along with your invite to your MP, you can attach an event schedule to your letter or email. MPs will be more likely to commit if they understand what their role in the event is
- If you are asking your MP to give a talk, provide guidance and direction as to what you'd like them to cover. This could be as simple as a few bullet points but will ensure they stay on topic. Ensure you keep your MP in the loop with how your event planning is progressing, and making sure they have all the relevant details in advance of the event taking place
- If you know there will be a broad range of people from their constituency there, you should mention this on the invitation to demonstrate that there is a constituency mandate
- MPs would likely have a minimum **4 week** lead in time into an event so factor this into your event timescales.



You're all set!

For support and any queries please contact

info@hftf.org.uk



Find out more about the Great Big Green Week



theclimatecoalition.org



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