

## People, projects, perspectives

# In the climate hot seat

**In April, Scottish party leaders were quizzed by young people on how they will actively address environmental issues. Panel member, *Anna Balmain*, reflects on some of the promises made**

Climate change has consistently been raised as one of the biggest issues for young voters in Scotland, meaning the environmental hustings held in April was a vital opportunity for Scotland's political leaders to share how they are prepared to act against climate change.

The leaders from Scotland's five main political parties attended the virtual event, which was organised by YouthLink Scotland along with young people representing youth organisations across Scotland, including Children in Scotland. Questions were submitted live to the leaders by a youth panel who were joined at the event by 85 young Scots watching along from home. Although the event was conducted online in order to meet the restrictions still in place, it still had a debate-like feel and those watching from home participated by commenting and sending in questions.

Five main climate topics were covered: Nature Emergency, Youth Voice, Emissions and Waste, Food Justice, and Climate Change and Targets.

### Climate friend or foe?

The politicians were questioned on what policies they will bring in to achieve the land use change needed to tackle the nature and climate crises.

Douglas Ross, Scottish Conservatives, spoke about his party's proposed "Dedicated Nature Bill" (for the next parliamentary term) that should "protect those species that are under threat". He also discussed increasing tree planting across Scotland.

**"We intend to hold politicians to their promises"**

Nicola Sturgeon, SNP, also discussed tree planting and identified she wanted to see an increase of "about 25% on tree planting" and, talking about peatlands, "a quarter of a million hectares (over the next few years) restored."

Leaders were also asked directly "What is your plan for climate action over the next five years?", with calls for specific details on plans to tackle how climate change disproportionately affects minorities and disadvantaged groups.

Anas Sarwar, Scottish Labour, talked of his ambition but warned Scotland could not do it alone, saying "Yes, I want us to be ambitious. Yes, I want us to be leading from the front. Yes, I want us to be world leading in Scotland, but we've also got to try and inspire international co-operation if we are going to challenge climate change."

Referencing the government's Climate Justice Fund, which is designed to help tackle the effects of climate change on the poorest and most vulnerable countries, Nicola Sturgeon told the young people gathered that she wanted to "double that that over the next few years".

Willie Rennie, Scottish Liberal Democrats, offered support for the Fund saying Scotland needs to "help other countries to deal with their carbon issue" and assist with the transition to new, more environmentally friendly forms of energy.

When asked when they think Scotland should stop producing fossil fuels the response varied, although there was continued reference to a 'Just Transition'. Patrick Harvie, Scottish Greens, identified hopes of fossil fuel extraction ending in Scotland in the next ten years and Anas Sarwar referred to Net Zero 2045 as "our deadline".

All parties also committed to banning all single-use plastic.

The Climate Hot Seat event was one of the only events to bring together all of Scotland's party leaders to discuss Scotland's journey to combatting the climate crisis. Young people have consistently raised climate change and environmental issues as a key concern for both the immediate and longer term future. This event helped shine a spotlight on how parties each plan to address some of the issues. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be involved. We, as young people, intend to hold them to their promises.

**Anna Balmain, 13, was a member of the panel representing Children in Scotland**

