

People's Emergency Briefing Draft Minutes

Climate and nature emergency meeting / St Saviour's Church, St Albans / September 2026

Purpose and outcome. The meeting combined a screening of the National Emergency Briefing film with audience discussion and closing addresses on local environmental action

Event format	Film screening, silent reflection, group discussion, audience contributions and closing addresses
Participants	Councillors, parliamentarians, community leaders, environmental and faith groups, schools, businesses and residents
Speakers recorded	Lee from the Ver Valley Society; the Mayor; a recorded message from Daisy Cooper MP preceded the film.

1 Film screening and initial reflection

The National Emergency Briefing film was shown to an audience of ~100. A minute's silence followed the film.

The audience were asked to identify three words that captured their immediate response. They discussed these reactions in small groups before the meeting moved into a facilitated plenary lasting approximately 10 to 20 minutes. The facilitator stressed that questions were as valuable as answers and that the session was not intended to settle technical questions.

2 Audience discussion

Public concern and democratic action

An audience member referred to the film's statement that 83 per cent of the population knew change was necessary and was worried about the issue. The contributor asked why this level of concern was not reflected in polling or voting behaviour. The facilitator noted that others in the room were likely to share the question, although no single answer was proposed.

Responsibility to children and future generations

A parent described the film's question, 'What will you tell the children?', as a useful test for present-day decisions. The contributor said that choices made while a child was five would need to withstand that child's questions at fifteen, and that this helped to keep personal decisions honest.

Environmental education

A 16-year-old audience member said that climate change received very little attention in their school lessons and that much of the film had been personally shocking. They asked why more environmental education was not provided in schools.

A contributor working in an infant school supported earlier education but said the film in its current form would not be suitable for younger children. They suggested producing a simpler, age-appropriate version so that understanding could begin before secondary school. Another participant observed that some adults might also benefit from a more accessible presentation.

From concern to practical action

Several contributors asked what each person would do differently after leaving the meeting. One group had selected 'responsibility' as a key word and argued that discussion about other people's views needed to be matched by personal and collective responsibility. Examples included eating less meat, using less plastic and choosing not to fly for a holiday.

A participant asked for a concise summary of practical actions attendees could take. They warned that people might feel moved or frightened immediately after the film but return to normal habits within days. The contributor argued that contacting MPs was important, but so was making a specific change in one's own life.

A further suggestion was to produce a follow-up film about ordinary people responding after a screening. Possible examples included adopting a vegetarian diet, taking holidays closer to home and considering solar panels. The purpose would be to show achievable changes and counter the feeling that individuals or a small country could have little effect.

Transport energy use and local impacts

A resident living near two schools raised the number of stationary petrol cars left idling. They described sometimes asking drivers to switch off their engines and called for greater education and publicity about the environmental and legal implications of idling.

The higher-level notes also recorded a request to consider the environmental impact of server farms. No fuller contribution or proposed response on this point was captured.

Climate history and the pace of present change

One participant offered a deliberately provocative challenge, noting past ice ages, warm periods and evidence of very different historic climates. While not disputing that carbon dioxide increased risk, the contributor questioned how current warming should be understood alongside natural climate cycles.

A respondent cited the hockey-stick curve or Keeling Curve, arguing that the rise in carbon dioxide and temperature over the industrial period was uniquely rapid in the available record. A further contribution noted that earlier warm periods did not involve a modern global population of roughly nine billion people and the same degree of human exposure. The facilitator welcomed the exchange as evidence of the range of views and knowledge in the room.

Politics media and positive examples

A contributor briefly defended politicians, suggesting that the central difficulty was the gap between widespread expressions of concern and the mandate conveyed through voting and public pressure. The same speaker contrasted predominantly negative coverage in conventional media with the more solution-focused material they encountered through LinkedIn, and encouraged attendees to seek out positive examples of work already under way.

3 Small group reflection

The facilitator invited participants to return to small groups and consider how they felt, how they might respond and whether any action felt appropriate. This part of the meeting was deliberately not reported back in plenary.

4 Address by Lee from the Ver Valley Society

Lee described campaigning to protect the River Ver and argued that talk alone had been insufficient. The Society wanted to demonstrate publicly that action was required and to hold organisations to account for excessive abstraction and pollution.

A protest was organised in Bury Hill Park in 2019. Nearly 400 people dressed in blue stood shoulder to shoulder on the dry riverbed. Participants included district and county councillors, landowners, businesses, schools, charities, faith groups, members of the public and the water campaigner and musician Feargal Sharkey. Lee said the event developed from an idea to delivery in one week and generated national coverage and substantial social-media attention.

Lee attributed subsequent progress not only to publicity but to sustained scrutiny by voters and bill-payers. After meetings, correspondence, networking and campaigning, Affinity Water had agreed to reduce environmental abstraction in the River Ver catchment by 9.1 million litres per day.

He also described his daughter's environmental work with other young people as planet protectors, eco-councillors and climate champions. They were beginning conversations with other schools to form a network of young campaigners, questioners and problem-solvers. His central message was that voices become effective through courage, persistence, collaboration and communication. He encouraged those present to meet someone new, exchange ideas and use the film as motivation for action.

5 Closing address by the Mayor

The Mayor welcomed councillors, parliamentarians, community leaders, environmental groups and residents. She stated that the mayoral role was politically impartial while acknowledging her experience as a Green councillor at district and county level. She emphasised that the evening was about evidence, shared responsibility and action rather than party politics or blame.

The Mayor described the climate and nature emergency as an issue for health, homes, food security, the economy, national security and community resilience. Climate change was already happening. Although not every consequence could now be prevented, the severity of future consequences could still be influenced: every fraction of a degree, tonne of carbon avoided, habitat restored, home protected and community prepared mattered.

She said governments, councils and major institutions needed to act at the necessary scale, while residents also held influence as consumers, employers, volunteers and voters. Drawing on parish-council experience, she cited tree planting, river monitoring, habitat restoration, water conservation, litter picking and community stewardship as examples of useful local work.

Three commitments proposed by the Mayor

Reduce your impact. Choose one significant, measurable change: improve home energy efficiency; drive or fly less; walk or cycle more; eat a more plant-rich diet; reduce food waste; or buy less and repair more. The question posed was: what is the most significant realistic change I can make within the next three months?

Strengthen local resilience. Prepare for heat, drought, flooding, pressure on food supplies and biodiversity loss; support vulnerable neighbours; conserve water; care for trees; and join local projects. The question posed was: what can we do together to make our neighbourhoods safer and more resilient?

Multiply your influence. Share what was learned; involve another person; seek practical commitments from workplaces, schools, faith groups and community organisations; and press public bodies for evidence-based action and accountability. The question posed was: who else can I involve, and what decision can we influence together?

The Mayor's theme was 'Belong Through Service'. She argued that joining a group, serving a cause or becoming active in a community created belonging while connecting efforts and amplifying collective influence. She closed by asking participants to turn information into intention and intention into action, stressing that individual action multiplied through community could become a movement.

6 Actions and follow up

No formal motions, organisational commitments, named action owners or deadlines were recorded. The following were invitations or proposals arising from the discussion rather than agreed actions:

- Each attendee to consider one significant and realistic personal change that could be made within three months.
- Attendees to consider joining or supporting an established community or environmental group in St Albans.
- Participants to raise evidence-based requests with councillors, MPs and public bodies respectfully and persistently.
- Schools and campaign groups to consider age-appropriate climate materials, including a simpler version of the film for younger children.
- Future communications to include practical local examples and positive case studies, not only descriptions of risk.
- Further attention to be given to vehicle idling near schools and to the environmental impact of server farms.
- Local groups to continue building networks across schools, businesses, faith groups, charities and residents.

7 Close

The meeting closed with thanks to the speakers, facilitators and attendees. The final emphasis was on collaboration, service and the conversion of concern into practical, sustained community action.