

PACT Chairman's Report 2019

What an extraordinary year this has been! As PACT enters its twelfth year, we are at last experiencing levels of both local and global environmental awareness and action that we could only have dreamt of when we started back in 2008, and recent events make it feel that PACT has finally come of age.

Whilst PACT represents only a miniscule fraction of that global movement, in terms of its role in the local community, it does represent a respected voice. This was no more apparent than in the lead-up to the District Council elections back in May when, in conjunction with Penrith Green Party and Penrith Extinction Rebellion, and assisted by the Lib Dems and Labour, PACT petitioned and campaigned for Eden District Council to declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency. Together with Penrith XR we organised a very successful hustings attended by almost all of the political parties, and we held three brain-storming summits with experts from a range of backgrounds, to look at the issues to be faced both by the local authority and the community it serves, when taking action following the declaration of an emergency. I had the privilege of presenting our case to the full Council back in July, when the motion was passed by a large majority of councillors.

PACT is now looking forward to working with EDC, with CAFS, and with a range of other organisations from the voluntary, public and private sector within Eden, and above all with local communities, in devising and putting into action strategies that address the challenges to be faced, but also in understanding and celebrating the enormous benefits to be gained, when working together to achieve Zero Carbon Eden by 2030. Indeed, I believe that PACT not only has a great opportunity to engage with the local community to promote such actions, but has an absolute responsibility to do so, if we are to put our money where our mouth is.

However, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to carry out these functions, with the small number of dedicated and active members that we have at present, and I believe that our most urgent priority is to enlist new, active members (or to re-engage with existing ones) to help us in our mission, and to help spread the load. We could achieve so much more, with just a little more help from our members and supporters, not only with issues arising directly from the Climate and Ecological Emergency declaration, but with discreet ongoing projects, such as those around single-use plastics, refill schemes, the Ullswater Valley project, repair cafes, and so on. Earlier this week, I sent a "Call to Arms" to everyone on the PACT contact list. So far this has produced a small number of responses, but I'm hopeful that this will grow. We must make every possible effort to recruit new, active members.

We are lucky in having a supportive local newspaper, in the Cumberland and Westmorland Herald, which is always willing to publish reports of our activities. It headlined and ran an editorial on the Climate Emergency declaration by EDC, and its letters page has seen climate change issues eclipsed only by those around B***** issues, as the main area of debate. Since April, when PACT kicked off the correspondence around climate change, I have counted 23 letters expressing support for, and understanding of, these issues, and only five opposing which, for a period of time, helped fuel the debate!

When it comes to publicising PACT, I must again mention our enormous gratitude to Jaki for preparing our regular update newsletters, which are done with such professionalism, and to Chris for making sure that the website is kept up to date. Earlier in the year, Nigel joined Jaki in working for CAFS, and the lead-up to the Cumbria Green Build and Sustainable Living Festival, which has been

running throughout September, has taken over their lives for several months. Therefore, for them to give their precious free time to help PACT, is even more remarkable, and we are indebted to them. Their work on issues around plastics and refill schemes has inevitably had to take a back seat during this summer, and this is why it is even more important that we provide support wherever possible, and more than hitherto.

Various events and activities in which PACT members have participated, included Penrith's May Day event, where we used the opportunity to gather many more signatures to the Climate petition, and to further publicise our work on plastics. Less memorably, PACT was represented at Lowther Show in August, which turned into a wash-out both literally and metaphorically!

A similarly soaking, but more memorable event was "Another Waywright Day" on 31st August, the launch of Amy Bray's "Another Way" charity, to which PACT has donated £500, when over 600 people ascended a number of Wainwright fells. PACT's chosen fell was that metaphor for our times, Great Cockup, near Lorton, where Jaki, Nigel and I fought our way to the top in torrential rain and gale-force winds. Amy's charity, along with its name-sake plastic-free shop which had opened in Penrith in January, and the formation of a very active local Extinction Rebellion group, represent encouraging signs that the tide is turning when it comes to public awareness of the range of issues that we are grappling with.

Several of us attended the Climate Emergency conference in Lancaster at the end of March, and members have also attended Carbon and Climate Literacy Training days, the Self-Build event at Rheged in July, and the CAfS Youth Climate Question Time held at UCC. Also at UCC, PACT took part in their June Eco Event day, with emphasis on Freegle, repair and recycling activities. I think that Chris will say a brief word in a minute, about the ongoing Freegle events and the Repair Cafes.

Joan Robinson has again devoted huge amounts of her time, both with litter-picking, but principally in organising and working with the Community Gardeners, and she too will say a bit more about this shortly. Joan does a fantastic job within the community, and has always been a doer rather than a talker! As Malcolm says, if you don't want to find yourself roped in to doing something, then avoid Joan's gaze at all costs! And when it comes to helping, can I thank all of you who I may not have mentioned individually, for your participation and support with the work of PACT.

Most recently, several of us attended the excellent CAfS Cumbria Climate Action Emergency Summit in Carlisle last Saturday, and of course a couple of nights ago here in the Parish Centre, PACT hosted, on behalf of CAfS "Green Build and Sustainable Living Festival", the outstanding talk by Mike Berners-Lee, attended by an audience of 100.

During the course of the year we had to lose two of our Board members: Virginia Taylor, for whom having been elected as Leader of EDC meant that she could not possibly devote more time to PACT, although she remains a firm supporter; and our treasurer Bill White, who retired as Vicar of Greystoke, he and Rosemary moving away from the area to be nearer their family. Bill was replaced with indecent haste by Philip Sturgess, press-ganged to the post within moments of attending his first PACT meeting! Thank you, Philip, for taking on this role with such competence, and for your enthusiastic help with our other activities. At this point, I must also note our gratitude to Jo Heeley who, without charge, so kindly prepares the PACT accounts.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without thanking all other Board members for their input during the year, not least our secretary Christine, who not only issues accurate and succinct minutes of our meetings, but who always keeps her eye on the ball to ensure that nothing slips past unnoticed.

I'm sure that we've all had comments thrown at us, along the lines of "You're wasting your time, it's the likes of China and India who we need to stop polluting the planet", and "The UK only accounts for a tiny amount of global CO2 emissions; you need to go after the big fish, not the tiddlers". My response to this is quite simply, that without the tiddlers, the big fish wouldn't exist. Our role as individuals isn't diminished by virtue of the presence of these giants: in my view, it is strengthened.

When, as sometimes happens, I despair at the lack of progress that we, as individuals, seem to be making, I remind myself of that quotation by the American anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has". Thankfully, there are now many millions of such committed citizens.

I believe firmly that the potential for PACT to play a part within our community, around issues associated with the climate and ecological emergency, has never been greater. Quite how this may play out, in terms of PACT's role and our ability to fulfil this, should become clearer very soon. As I write this report, we are waiting to see how Eden District Council is proposing to implement strategies to put its Climate and Ecological Emergency declaration into effect, and hopefully this is imminent. We may indeed learn more next Tuesday at the Council's "Vision for Eden District 2019 – 2023" consultation event at Rheged, when we are running a PACT stall, and attending the evening session which is geared towards community organisations and local councils. This should at least provide an opportunity for PACT to network with organisations, with whom we may expect to work over coming months.

When all is said and done, and for many of the wrong reasons, we live in interesting times! The inescapable fact is that we do have a climate and ecological emergency, so let's all re-commit to playing our part, in whatever way we can.

John Bodger, Chair, PACT

27th September 2019