Escalatory Potential in a Run Up to Elections

The Bigger Picture

Community Assemblies are part of a bigger plan for Extinction Rebellion and these are also to some degree, driven by significant times in the electoral calendar, such as general, devolved, or local elections. Community Assemblies could be a useful route to **escalate issues raised at local assemblies**, all the way up to Westminster.

During key points in our election cycles, highlighting XR's 3rd Demand to local politicians - or even local officers and councillors in your local authority - gets the idea of real democracy and participation on the radar of those in power, opening conversations on upgrading our democratic systems.

By building understanding of deliberative democracy in relation to a key area of policy, which has been poorly enacted, namely our climate and ecological crisis, we can advocate for **our 3rd demand to demonstrate that there are options to upgrade our democracy generally**, beginning with a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice.

In The Climate Concerned Mix

Politicians and Officers of Authorities

Remember, that each local area will have different political backdrops. **Some local authorities may have** declared a climate emergency, while others may still be resisting change. Even where a climate emergency is publicly announced, this may yet not be turning into **adaptation and mitigation** measures where you are.

Your local group or grassroots campaign may or may not have established links with local candidates, politicians, local officers of the council, or may be aware of whom among your politicians is supporting the Climate and Ecology Bill.

Community Groups

There are so many urgent issues facing communities around the UK, whatever the focus for your community assembly, it's all of value in building **active engagement in citizenship**, which can only **strengthen democratic principles and practices**, as face down the risks of societal

breakdown through climate catastrophes we are yet to face.

You may be working alongside allied organisations, who share these concerns, or your groups still may be in the process of building connections and relationships, e.g. through climate centres. More resources will be added to over time on our **Resources** page to help you map your local community and identify whom you can benefit from working with, but we also recommend talking to umbrella organisations for signposting such as the **Council for Voluntary Organisations / Associations** where you are.

Local community organisers may wish to hold an assembly on a topic important to local people. This may or may not have the aim of making **assembly recommendations to take to your local or regional authority**. We strongly recommend that your organising group decide in advance of your assembly which outcomes you all want to achieve when deciding your topic for deliberation. What happens afterwards? Might you want to **escalate action** if local authorities are not responsive to recommendations you share with them (more on this later)?

Seize The Moment!

In the lead up to a **General Election, local election, or during the company reporting season** (at the end of Q4 / 4th Quarter i.e. March annually) **we all have greater influence on power brokers than at any other time**.

In particular, where politicians are in deadlock over issues around our climate and ecological emergency, we can open up conversations around community assemblies and a Citizen's Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice. We can also help to amplify complementary aims of for instance the Sortition Foundation, Humanity Project, Assemble, or others in the democracy building space. Reach out to anyone who share your values and aspirations, because we have strength in numbers.

The principle of "Here Comes Everyone" still applies in relation to XR's movement building strategy.

If your local authorities are obstructive or dragging their feet on issues of concern to you and others, then alongside your community allies, that is the perfect time to share the ideas arising from local Community Assemblies on those issues and think about how you can best get other groups on board to push for change at a time when party candidates are jockeying for position in elections!

Tips on How To Engage Your Local or Unitary Authority

1. Be aware that **Council elections usually have low turnout and that this helps you!** Local politicians are sensitive to changes in community opinions, particularly those of **influential groups**. Identifying such groups and finding common ground with them will help strengthen your campaign and reach more people.

Map out your key organisations via this **Power Map** tool

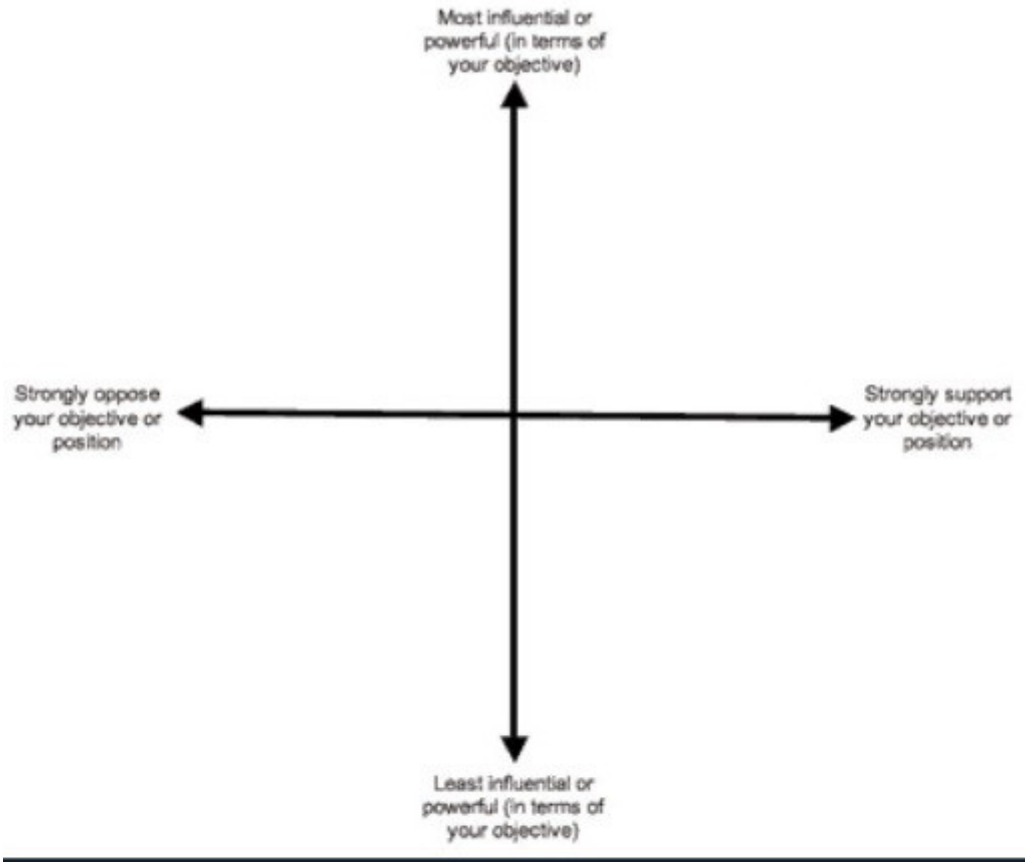


Diagram of a power map.

2. Local politicians are likely to be quite scared of dealing with XR, so start gently. To begin, **contact them by email, attend a surgery, or phone them**. Invite them to **attend your local assembly** or ask for their **support for a campaign**. Think about whatever could work locally.
3. Try to make an appointment to meet with the relevant **Chair of Committee** or **Portfolio Holder** responsible for the issue you're raising, to discuss an assembly or particular campaign ideas. If you can, offer your local XR group's support for a policy that politician is involved with; it will be appreciated and helps to build trust. Talk to XR UK's Political Circle / Political Engagement Cymru for help.

4. In advance of your assembly, give the impression of having lots of **local support** for the issue you're raising (which of course may be the case, such as water pollution). Build your credibility by raising a petition; focus this on local people, they probably won't be interested in the views of others! Alternatively, set up a gathering, run a survey, use social media, take photographs, etc. Contact Councillors to alert them to what you're doing and talk about support gained.

5. Follow up what you do by **submitting Questions to Full Council**, which will make the Council's response public, may be reported in the media, and with prior permission you can film the response and use in social media, to grow interest.

Tipping Point of Community Power!

Extinction Rebellion's strategic aim is to achieve a tipping point of local support that pushes the conversation about a Citizen's Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice.

Ultimately, we want to reach Westminster ears, plus our devolved and regional authorities. **This can only come from grassroots in numbers**, i.e. us, the people, alongside our allies in the deliberative democracy sphere and elsewhere.

We know our **political systems are broken**. Imagine a proven and more inclusive method of decision making that ensures the interests of people and nature are taken into careful consideration, in all decisions. Imagine decision making where no one is left behind and we transition together, collaboratively to a healthier, fairer society. Mobilising and empowering local people at the grassroots is the starting point...

XR's approach is that over those months leading up to elections, local groups could be taking up nonviolent direct action around their local authorities who refuse to engage with the people.

Of course, your devolved local or regional authority might already be in agreement to implement recommendations from local assemblies... It's already starting to happen. (See Case Studies).

But What if Your Powers that Be Are Not Listening?

If your local authority, a company, or whomever you need to listen doesn't want to take those recommendations on board, or engage with improving community participation in democratic decisions and citizenship, this is the time to **consider escalation**.

So for instance, if your local authority will not support your community in the following ways, you may consider **occupying uncollaborative local or unitary authorities, or corporate offices**.

XR Local Groups have had great success with getting support from allies in some of the following situations where authorities are not collaborating or engaging:

- Your relevant authority refuses to take on board **recommendations arising from well-organised local community assemblies**.
- Your local authority (LA) **refuses to declare a climate and ecological emergency**.
- Your Local Authority scores low on the National Score Card. This Score Card shows progress made by your local council towards achieving net zero across a range of business areas, e.g. buildings, finance, biodiversity, transport, collaboration and engagement, waste and more. Performance in each area of work is scored as a percentage. This is useful information to use in discussions with politicians.
- Your LA refuses to join the UN 'Race To Zero' initiative.

What Does Escalation Mean?

An Assembly Escalation Plan begins with organising your local Community Assembly and collating recommendations for sharing with the decision maker. This could be a local council, regional authority, or even a company such as your local water services provider. In election run-ups, assemblies can have real impact, as candidates want to be seen to be listening to their constituents.

When you share those requests and recommendations with that authority's officers, or local parliamentary / constituency candidates, they may or may not engage. That gives your group the opportunity to build on the original purpose of your assembly with escalatory measures to influence processes. The 'escalatory' approach means applying pressure on local/regional politicians or company board members, to bring about meaningful change, based on the aspirations coming out of your local deliberations.

Find out more on how your campaigning group could follow a set of simple steps to be heard here: 5 Step Escalation Plan .

Need More Pointers?

- If you are not sure about where the decision making powers lie where you are, have a look at the Combined Authorities map to find out who to target.
- View the Introduction to the Community Assembly Escalation Plan Open Call.
- Check out the slideshow used in the call.

If you have any questions on any of the choices of direction you face, or just need to bounce ideas around join our Assemblies Sharing Chat.

Whatever your concerns, take from this guidance what is relevant to your local situation.
