

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Our July meeting took the form of a discussion on the effectiveness of environmental protests. Not surprisingly, we couldn't come up with a definite answer. While there have been some successes (halting fracking in Lancashire, for example), it's not clear what many other protests have achieved.

We were able to get an insight into the thinking of one group – Extinction Rebellion (XR) – from our guest, Janet Antrobus, a member of XR from Kendal. XR feel compelled to use civil disobedience tactics because they feel that those in power simply refuse to listen to a reasoned argument, and there's not much time left to solve the problems of climate change.

There was considerable sympathy in the group for XR's aims, though less for their tactics. Protests targeted specifically at those in power seemed more likely to be effective than those inconveniencing the general public. But we were all grateful to Janet for explaining XR's point of view.

We took a month off in August, resuming in September with a video of a talk entitled "What will it really take to deal with climate change?" by Mike Berners-Lee, author of the book "There is no planet B". After reviewing the now-overwhelming evidence for the harm caused by man-made climate change, he went on to set out his main thesis – mankind is faced with a whole range of interlinked environmental and social problems, including pollution, biodiversity, agriculture, population and inequality. We won't solve any of them unless we tackle all of them.

The good news is that the technology and know-how to solve all these problems is already there. What is needed is a change of attitude on the part of those in power. Dr Berners-Lee was optimistic that as the scale of the damage to the environment becomes ever more obvious, governments will wake up and mobilise the necessary resources. He felt that everyone can help this process by putting whatever pressure we can on our governments. While not all of us shared Dr Berners-Lee's optimism, we all agreed that it had been a most impressive talk.

Our October meeting was more down-to-earth, with speakers recounting their own experience of using "green" technology. Brian Loader gave an excellent account of the process of getting and running an electric car – reasons for going electric, how they chose a specific model (in their case a Renault Zoe), advantages (much lower running costs and carbon footprint) and limitations (restricted range, so they don't use it for long journeys). Thanks, Brian, for sharing your "electric car journey" with us. I think we're all now much better informed.

I concluded proceedings by talking about our experience of using battery storage to back up solar panels. We installed a Tesla Powerwall (other makes are available) to supplement our solar PV panels in March 2021, and I've been monitoring our electricity usage ever since. The results have been even better than I expected – storing electricity generated during the day and using it at night means that we take virtually nothing from the grid during the summer months. And averaged over a whole year, we now generate 75% of the electricity we use. Oh yes, and it can take over during power cuts too!

John Eakins