Prototyping report

Data sharing for climate campaign organisations and communities

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Summary

This is a report on the sixth of a series of “prototyping weeks” run by mySociety in 2022. The week was run in partnership with The Climate Coalition and Green Alliance, as part of a wider project aiming to build capacity and enable greater collaboration between national climate campaign organisations and their local community groups. The question for the week was:

How might we use data to make local engagement, influencing, and organising around climate action stronger, more focussed, and more sustainable?

Through online workshops with representatives from The Climate Coalition member organisations like Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and The Wildlife Trusts, we quickly identified the user needs of political teams and community outreach teams, and how data on MPs, constituencies, and local climate groups contributes to their day-to-day work. (→ pp. 5–7)

We identified four key challenges holding back progress in this area: Using data to improve the quality and dynamism of campaigns to high priority constituencies and MPs; Encouraging ‘movement generosity’ and enabling connections inside and between organisations; Exposing more of what’s happening ‘on the ground’ in constituencies, in local groups and events; and using data to better validate the effectiveness of campaigns. (→ pp. 7–9)

We considered a number of targeted digital/data tools (→ pp. 11–13), but ultimately chose to prototype a more open-ended data sharing platform, as a way to test the sorts of datasets that our target users need, the actions that better access to data would enable, and finally, the extent to which shared data could enable more cross-organisation collaboration. (→ pp. 14–16)

Feedback on the prototype was very positive. Data on groups, places, and events in a locality ranked highly for the target users, followed by data on public opinion and relationships with MPs. Testers seemed happy to share and open up their own datasets, where possible. The map-based interface for identifying target constituencies was welcomed—although, alongside a data download for more proficient users—and we discovered that sharing these filtered views themselves could enable not only better coordination of campaigns between organisations, but also knowledge-sharing on the factors that have gone into selecting the constituencies for a given campaign. (→ pp. 17–22)

Encouraged by the findings, we are looking to proceed with a second iteration of the prototype, in particular aiming to gather more feedback from local climate groups, and more technical exploration into the level of data maintenance / data updates we can expect from campaign organisations and local groups. (→ pp. 23)
About the prototyping weeks

mySociety is the charity behind UK civic services like TheyWorkForYou, WriteToThem, and WhatDoTheyKnow. We build open, digital solutions to help repower democracy, in the UK and around the world.

Our Climate programme has the goal of facilitating the reduction of the ~30% of UK carbon emissions that are either directly controlled or influenced by local government. We are doing this by deploying data and digital services to support a faster, fairer, more collaborative response to climate, enabled by local democratic institutions and processes.

We believe that digital services have a role to play via:

- More public participation to drive political action
- Local government learning, action and innovation
- A better information ecosystem around local democratic climate action

We’re exploring ideas for new digital services, and actively looking to identify opportunities to work with and in support of other organisations. One way we’re doing this is through prototyping weeks – where we work with others to research, explore, prototype and test ideas.

For this prototyping week, we partnered with The Climate Coalition and Green Alliance, who were keen to explore the potential that a shared data platform might have for environmental and humanitarian charities in the UK, their local groups, and the wider climate sector.

Throughout the week, we made heavy use of the expertise of representatives from all of these organisations—including Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, WWF, and The Wildlife Trusts—as well as leading organisations in the community engagement space, including Hope for the Future, Civic Power Fund, and Climate Outreach.

What follows is a summary of what we did and found during that prototyping week.
Identifying user needs

The Climate Coalition invited us to explore this week's theme as part of a wider project they're running, which aims to enhance public understanding of climate change, power up local and national influencing of decision makers such as MPs, and build networks and power in local community groups.

They had already undertaken significant research into the political context and imperative of this wider project, and were planning a three-pronged approach:

1. Some form of open source data platform to power a community of interest around local climate action and policy-making.
2. Convening to share learning and to co-commission testing and accelerator projects in key communities.
3. And finally, drawing on this data and learning to feed into the development of shared strategies and plans for local engagement and organising, to improve collaboration and impact across the sector.

Our prototyping week focussed on the first part of this approach – the shared data platform.

We were joined by potential users of the service—participants from organisations including Civic Power Fund, Friends of the Earth, Green Alliance, Greenpeace, Hope For The Future, The Wildlife Trusts, and WWF, as well as members of The Climate Coalition's Community Working Group—for the week's opening workshops, aimed at uncovering the challenges and opportunities around sharing data on MPs, constituencies, and local climate group activity across the UK.

Successes

We used a 'lightning decision jam' format first, to gather examples of success indicators and challenges. Positives indicators included:

- **Knowledge sharing** – “Joining the dots to make networks and the community more than the sum of their parts” – there was a feeling that sharing capacity and expertise is happening already in the sector, though perhaps at a much smaller scale than is really required to address the climate emergency.

- **Pooling resource** – There was a feeling that larger organisations could support the movement by sharing data, 'insight', or resources with smaller organisations. Also that local community groups could be incentivised to connect together, pooling resources, time, and energy, to achieve common goals.

- **Data literacy** – The challenge of working with data appeared as both a strength and a weakness in this activity. Participants were excited about the potential of using data to make sense of changes in public opinion, or “what really moves local politics”, but felt
there was a lack of knowledge on both how to extract this information from research data, and how to apply it in campaigns.

- **Interpreting action** – Participants were excited about the potential for “better learning together, about what works on the ground with new audiences”. Measuring both local community engagement, and MP/policy-maker engagement, with TCC member campaigns is challenging, but incredibly useful for building more impactful campaigns in the future.

- **Sparking community action** – Such as finding and activating unlikely advocates from unexpected community groups, or building a base of supporters who will take part in campaigns at short notice. There was a desire to see more examples of best practice in curating this type of community action.

- **Enriching/transforming data** – There was some excitement about overlaying national and local datasets, or extrapolating between the two – for example, using national statistics on cost of living or health inequalities, to influence campaign planning in specific constituencies.

**Challenges**

Challenges noted by participants included:

- **Lack of capacity** – Collecting, analysing, and using data is often not anybody’s specific jobs, and there’s a lack of capacity within campaigning organisations to prioritise this work. “Turning data into insight” takes time and resources.

- **Validating effectiveness of campaigns** – This was related to an earlier point about the importance of interpreting actions. Participants said there are challenges in measuring the success or impact of campaigns, for example because of a lack of data, or a long lead-time for data. There was a feeling that more “message testing”, before a campaign has gone out, would also help make campaigns more effective.

- **Keeping up to date with political changes** – As one participant wrote: “What happens if everything shifts at the next General Election?” Even outside of election cycles, there was a feeling that there’s a lack of infrastructure and capacity to keep up with the speed of change in local and national “politics”. Cabinet reshuffles, for example, can quickly force a change of direction in a campaign that’s been planned for months or years.

- **Diversity of data sources** – Participants worried that data was often collected by and about “the usual suspects”. There was a desire to co-produce campaigns with local communities, and make more of community organising principles, but an uncertainty about how to find out who these communities are and how to find and support community organisers on the ground.
• **Turning data into action** – “How do we make sure data helps us make better decisions?” Some participants felt that the ability to overlay more datasets, to spot patterns, trends, or gaps, would help them identify meaningful actions. Others felt that we should focus on guidance and support for people to make the best use of data analysis tools.

• **Siloed organisations** – This was the most popular challenge by far. “Organisations fail to see the value in movement generosity,” one participant wrote. “Would be good to know what others are working on, so as not to duplicate work,” wrote another. While it was accepted that different organisations will have different goals (and therefore make use of different narratives or datasets), there was a feeling that opportunities for collaboration were being missed, and “institutional memory” on what works and what doesn’t was being lost.

• **Scale of data** – This ties in with an earlier point about data literacy. Political and community organiser teams are dealing with 600+ MPs, in 600+ geographies, and there are more potential datasets than could ever be used. How can teams find and share the most useful data sources? How can they keep on top of a massive, constantly changing data landscape?

• **Political landscape (including risk aversion)** – There were two overlapping issues here. First, the challenge of organisations dealing with an increasingly volatile political landscape (especially in Westminster, and the devolved nations) while attempting to stay politically neutral. And second, the feeling that some organisations are fairly risk averse when it comes to reputation and comms, and may struggle in controlling the narrative around campaigns.

• **Data consistency** – “Our own systems don’t speak to each other” one participant noted. In most organisations, the system for managing MP/political relationships is separate from the one for managing supporters and community engagement, and there was a feeling that this prevents more effective climate campaigning. When data is collected, it’s often inconsistent, making it harder to work with.

### Themes

Related successes and challenges were then prioritised through dot-voting, drawn out into groups, and investigated through the generation of “how might we” statements on four overall themes.

#### Turning data into action

How might we **use data to identify geographical gaps and priorities**? How might we **show how other organisations are applying data about this constituency/MP**? How might we **share information on what we’re all planning, to expose opportunities for collaboration**? How might we **uncover which voices carry the most weight with MPs or voters**?
Participants expressed interest in overlaying datasets to find patterns, trends, and gaps in the areas being reached by current climate outreach, and to identify priority areas for support and increased climate activity. Data might include proxies of MP stances/influence, local environment statistics, details of key infrastructure works, and—most importantly—information about the activity of climate groups in the area.

**Siloed organisations**

How might we **share data and campaigning work without ruining the element of surprise and campaign strategy**? How might we **demonstrate the value of shared data to other teams inside our organisations, which might be less “movement generous”**? How might we **provide richer material for comms and fundraising users to draw on in the storytelling**? How might we **associate shared datasets with a shared vision of what we’re trying to achieve**?

There are two overlapping challenges here. The first is enabling data to flow, technologically, between the different systems that organisations use to manage their datasets on MPs, constituencies, supporters, and campaigns / community action.

The second, harder challenge is encouraging “movement generosity” or the sharing of this (often “hard won”) data between teams and organisations. There will need to be a clear benefit to the sharing, and any tool that attempts to break down the barriers between organisations will need to quickly demonstrate this benefit, in order to attract and keep users within these organisations.

**Understanding MPs and constituents better**

How might we **surface the (political) issues that local communities care about the most**? How might we **capitalise on local stories / local perspectives**? How might we **understand MPs’ real stance on climate issues (not just the party line)**? How might we **identify which MPs are more susceptible to change**?

Data sources currently relied upon by campaign organisations included: political data providers like DeHavilland and Dodds, TheyWorkForYou (for voting histories, and especially votes against the party line), BrandWatch, “endless internet searches”, and various online sources for MPs’ memberships of political groups, APPGs, etc.

Political data that participants would love access to included: MPs’ memberships of WhatsApp groups, contact with “friends and influencers” of policy-makers, MPs’ published quotes or speeches, and MPs’ interests / hobbies (to help political teams build a rapport with them).

Participants also wished they had better access to information about what’s happening “on the ground” in constituencies – whether that’s information about local groups active in the area, or opinion polling information that could help identify key areas to target in campaigns.
Validating the effectiveness of campaigns

How might we monitor indicators of effectiveness other than just “did the MP say/do this thing”? How might we provide a space for decision-makers to feed back which message “reached” or influenced them? How might we create standards of proof to reflect confidence levels that actions = changes?

This was identified as a particularly challenging area, but one that’s central to the work these organisations do. Without a means of measuring the effectiveness of their campaigns, the organisations are effectively shouting into a void. The question is, what sorts of data can help them with this measurement?

The suggestion that MPs could “feed back” what persuaded them to change their minds was an interesting one, although probably difficult to gather. After some discussion, participants were particularly keen on “information about what people are doing, where” as an indicator of local take-up of national campaigns, and a pointer towards the MPs that could be engaged with further. It would be very important for this information about local activity to be “live”, or at least updated frequently, to draw timely conclusions on the effectiveness of recent and ongoing campaigns.

User groups

We already came into these workshops with an idea of the user groups The Climate Coalition had in mind as part of their wider project. But through conversation, we found out more about the behaviours and needs of these users (as we put it, “what keeps them up at night?”) which could help us tailor our prototype:

- **Political teams** – Concerned with “getting noticed” in a frantic political environment, demonstrating value to MPs and their teams (providing trusted intelligence, briefings, etc), and keeping on top of what MPs are saying inside and outside Parliament. They try to match up local sentiment with MP and party stances, to change policy-makers’ opinions. They’re also interested in local groups’ / local constituents’ interactions with MPs, and can find it frustrating when that intelligence isn’t fed back up the chain by over-stretched community outreach teams.

- **Community outreach teams** – Ultimately concerned with how many people they’re engaging, through activities like events, campaigns, or training. They want to know “where our people are”, in constituencies around the country, and what those local groups are doing. They make a lot of progress with fairly small numbers (“you only need 10 personalised letters to change an MP’s mind”) but sharing or exposing these small numbers can still feel scary.

- **Campaigns teams** – Often play a central role, coordinating between political and community outreach teams. They care about identifying patterns in local action, local sentiment, political representatives, and national policy. They look to target their
campaigns through pools of “campaigners” or people who’ve previously taken a digital action with the organisation.

- **Decision-makers and resource allocators** – The upper levels of these organisations, concerned less with day-to-day comms or campaigning, and more with a snapshot view of the value or impact the organisation is having, and how it fits into the wider movement. Based on this, they can potentially change the resources or attention deployed in a particular area, or influence coordination/collaboration between different organisations in the movement.

- **Local community groups** – Care primarily about local issues, and how those feed into wider climate and ecological emergency narratives. They probably don’t need heavy data “analysis”, but could potentially benefit from more information about what’s happening in their area, or nearby areas. The community outreach teams at the national organisations would very much love to see these local groups “report back” what they’re working on, to feed into national-level organising decisions.
Potential interventions

Together with the attendees, we imagined a number of services that could address the challenges and user needs identified in the three workshops. Five such services are included below:

A specific ‘target list’ generator

A transactional service for campaigns teams (or political or community outreach teams). You input what you care about, and the black box returns a list of constituencies to focus on.

This is essentially a more standardised version of the various spreadsheets that national campaigners already curate. There is potential for target lists to be shared inside and between organisations (for coordinated actions, or just for inspiration) and for the lists to automatically update when the underlying data changes.

The big challenge is where the data will come from.

A secondary, but related, challenge is the lack of incentive for local campaign groups to contribute data, since the tool is focussed around the needs of national organisers, and wouldn’t offer much to help local groups.

A ‘dead link checker’ for local group contacts

Community outreach teams struggle with knowing whether their lists of local groups / contacts are up to date. And without up to date information about what’s happening in local areas, or what local resources you can rely on, it’s hard to develop effective campaign plans.

The suggestion was for some sort of service that helps these teams constantly audit or update their knowledge about grass-roots groups.

Big challenge, again, is where the data will come from. If organisations already have difficulty tracking their local groups, a tool won’t be able to solve the problem without either external data, or a change in behaviour.

And there is, again, a lack of incentive for local groups to list themselves on the tool, and keep their information up to date. Perhaps tie-ins could be explored with funding bodies, or support organisations like Community Voluntary Services – local groups might keep their data up to date, if it results in more funding or better support, or maybe the third-parties might be able to share which local groups they’re working with.
A more open-ended data sharing platform

A platform that attempts to serve both national and local organisers – by collecting and exposing not just data about MPs and constituencies, but also local groups, assets, and actions.

Data about what’s happening on the ground in constituencies is hard for national organisers to find – even if they can find it about their own organisation’s local groups, it’s almost impossible for them to find it about other complementary organisations’ local groups. Coordination between equivalent teams at separate national organisations relies on ad-hoc relationships, and trust that shared data will be reciprocated. Even when data is shared, it quickly falls out of date.

Data about what’s happening in a constituency, or nearby constituencies, might also be useful to local groups themselves – opening the door to cross-organisation collaboration, joint campaigns, and a more “united” approach to local politicians.

The big challenge here will be identifying the “killer datasets” that will demonstrate the value of shared data, and encourage sustainable data flows into the platform.

It’s likely that there’d need to be some sort of permissions system to allow contributors to share data only with those they’re comfortable with. As a result, another challenge will be encouraging contributors to err on the side of openness when uploading data, to benefit unanticipated but complementary reusers of the data.

A data standard for MP and constituency data

A data standard for the campaigning sector, to facilitate sharing of data inside and between organisations. The standard could define the IDs used to refer to constituencies and MPs, and a common set of core fields and formats for MP/constituency data.

Done well, this could promote the development of more effective, easier-to-use analysis and intelligence tools, or smoother integration of existing tools, enabling both national and local organisers to quickly identify patterns in constituency and MP data, and run more effective campaigns.

The big challenge is adoption. Even an organisation like The Climate Coalition likely doesn’t have the influence to make this standard ubiquitous, so instead this would probably require adoption from the manufacturers of the tools campaigners are already using (eg: Vuelio, DeHavilland, Microsoft PowerBI, Mailchimp, and Microsoft Dynamics) to ensure data can be imported/exported according to the standard. The incentives for manufacturers to adopt such a standard would need to be investigated.
A target MP ‘archetypes’ generator

Political teams often sort MPs into their own internal categories or ‘archetypes’, to facilitate campaigning. These categories are usually hand-assigned, and stored in spreadsheets, without any clear ‘workings’. It can be a challenge modifying categories, or keeping them up to date with changes in the MP or the situation in their constituency.

A service that built these archetypes from the combination of real, up-to-date information, and the organisation’s priorities, and then allowed the archetypes to be shared with other tools or even with other organisations, could help campaigners plan more effective actions, and make the most of constituent pressure from their local groups.
Prototype: Local Intelligence Hub

We chose to prototype the ‘open-ended data sharing platform’ identified above, as a solution to the challenges around surfacing local climate action, and encouraging the sharing of data and knowledge between climate campaign organisations.

In particular, we wanted the prototype to explore the following questions:

- **Datasets** – Which datasets do our target user groups currently use? Which new datasets would help them run more effective campaigns? And where would those datasets come from?
- **Understanding your area** – Does the tool help our target users understand what’s happening locally, on the ground?
- **Identifying areas to focus on** – Does the tool help our target users in political and campaign teams identify areas of interest across the UK?
- **What would you do next?** – Given this tool, what would our target users do as a result?
- **Encouraging cross-organisation collaboration** – Would this tool encourage or facilitate cross-organisation collaboration? How?

We quickly storyboarded (see [this Miro board](https://miro.com/)) and built a point-and-click prototype that would help us explore these questions, available at [https://mysociety.github.io/local-intelligence-hub](https://mysociety.github.io/local-intelligence-hub). A selection of screens from the prototype are included below.

From the homepage, users are able to either jump to a specific parliamentary constituency (to see detailed data about the area and its MP), or explore patterns in data at a national level.
The national page begins with every constituency in England, Scotland, and Wales visible on a map. As the user adds “filters”, the number of matching constituencies is reduced. They’re also able to shade constituencies by datasets. Non-functional buttons at the bottom hinted at the possibility of viewing or downloading the underlying table of data, and saving the filter parameters for later.

The screen for adding a filter to the map suggested the types of data that might be available (including data about MPs, opinion polling, demographics, and local groups), the three levels of dataset visibility (public, members-only, and private to just you), and the suggestion that you might be able to add your own datasets.
The individual constituency page suggested the types of data that might be available, as well as the idea that some datasets might only be visible to The Climate Coalition members.
Prototype feedback

We tested the prototype both via one-to-one calls and an online form, with 23 target users from a number of organisations, including:

- Two local Wildlife Trusts (Sussex and Warwickshire)
- A local VCSE support org (Support Staffordshire)
- CAFOD
- Civic Power Fund
- Climate Outreach
- Friends of the Earth
- Green Alliance
- Hope for the Future
- National Trust
- Subak
- The Climate Coalition
- The WI
- The Wildlife Trusts
- WWF

Their feedback helped us understand more about the questions we’d identified:

Datasets

The testing participants listed a huge number of datasets that they currently use, or that they would love to use if they were more accessible:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MP data</th>
<th>Constituency data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MP’s previous careers</td>
<td>TCC member orgs / local groups in the area, and campaigns / events they’ve run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which boards MP is sat on</td>
<td>Number of supporters in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some measure of MP’s ‘influence’ on climate policy (eg: membership of</td>
<td>Contact details for local groups / supporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cabinet, APPGs, or non-parliamentary groups like CERA or CEN)</td>
<td>Urbanness / ruralness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing whether the MP has signed up to a climate pledge before an</td>
<td>“Values of people here”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>election</td>
<td>Demographics (eg: age, deprivation, education, religion, food bank usage, EV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security of MP’s seat (electoral majority, likelihood to win at next</td>
<td>chargers per capita)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>election?)</td>
<td>Environmental data (eg: flooding, wildlife)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCC member orgs already targeting this MP</td>
<td>Voting data (voting intention, last GE turnout, 2016 Brexit vote split)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCC member orgs’ / local groups’ relationship with the MP (positive,</td>
<td>Cross-boundary infrastructure (eg: HS2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative, strong, weak?)</td>
<td>Major sites (eg: gigafactory, power plant, airport, steelworks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some measure of TCC ‘influence’ over MP</td>
<td>Local media contacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A few datasets in particular stood out during our discussions as potentially transformative for the target users:

1. **Groups, places, and events nearby** – This data is useful to national organisers for at least three reasons: identifying areas missed from their existing campaigns; mapping areas with influential or target MPs where they also already have supporters; and ensuring campaigns don’t duplicate effort. We heard that it’s also useful to funders (looking to measure impact, or identify new initiatives to support), and even to local community groups themselves – “Community groups often ask me whether they’re in a priority area, and whether there are other nearby groups to connect with,” said one community outreach organiser.

2. **Who has a good relationship with MPs** – Political teams in particular need to know the most effective way to reach, and ultimately influence, MPs. These could be relationships held by organisers at other big national organisations, or from local groups or even individual constituents in the MP’s area. “Like if we had a thing next to the Womens’ Institute on that page, which said: contact the WI, they have a really good relationship with the MP,” one respondent imagined – “That’d be massive for us!” enthused another.

A key issue remains the source of these datasets. Some, such as demographics, are publicly available and could be easily imported. Others could potentially be extracted from organisations’ own supporter management and CRM systems – although this will likely prove hard to automate. The Climate Coalition has expressed an interest in commissioning their own constituency-level opinion polling, which could clearly be uploaded to the platform. But beyond that, many of the more valuable datapoints are manually collected, and would need to be individually uploaded and maintained by users of the service. Incentivising this behaviour will be a prime consideration.

“This type of platform is only as good as the data within it – will it be regularly updated?”

— User testing participant

Testers seemed generally happy to open up data where possible. One even checked whether their privacy policy allowed them to share data with fellow campaigning organisations, and was surprised to find it did. A respondent from the WI said they were in the process of mapping their local groups and would be happy to contribute the list once it was completed.

Our instinct is that a very basic level of information that at least helps users dig further will be enough to prove worth, at least for a first version of the service. Knowing **who** the groups are in an area, for example, is enough, as long as you’re then able to contact the local group to find out the more qualitative information about what they’ve done or what sort of relationship they have with their MP.
“Even if you could only get data on who (at which organisations) is talking to / has talked to this MP, that'd be amazing.”

— User testing participant

Understanding your area

There was a lot of positive feedback from testers on whether this platform looked like it would help them understand what’s happening locally, on the ground, in the constituencies.

Testers were impressed by the simplicity of displaying information in three sections: MPs, demographics, and local groups. Community outreach organisers, and the testers with a political campaigning background were excited by the listing of local community groups, assets, and events in particular. We heard how this is data that’s incredibly hard to find right now, so anything that could be done to surface more of how local groups are working would massively help in organising campaigns and reaching MPs.

A couple of testers clearly came from a more qualitative background, and found themselves wanting less numeric, and more long-form written content about the constituency. But they agreed this sort of data doesn’t lend itself to mapping or summarising. Perhaps there could be a way for deeper, more qualitative data, to be linked to from the platform, without necessarily being part of the filtering / summarising process?

There was a repeated comment that the tool should do more to enable comparisons between constituencies. Feedback was positive on the interactivity of the map interface for filtering and identifying target constituencies, but users found it difficult to dip into and back out of these constituencies to understand what makes the constituencies different.

“‘I’m trying to understand what is different about this place. What values do people here hold? How are they different to people elsewhere?’”

— User testing participant

We got the impression that local groups are unlikely to be interested in a national view, but might find a regional view interesting – to find out what makes their area different to its regional neighbours, or to find groups in similar areas to partner up with. A few testers mentioned the possibility of regional comparisons baked into the constituency pages, and of displaying infrastructure projects or activities happening across constituency boundaries.
“A visual representation of activity in or near the area would be useful – useful to know what's happening on or just outside the boundaries of priority areas.”
— User testing participant

We found participants from local groups were mostly uninterested in data about their MP – perhaps because they already know who their MP is, and what their stance is on climate issues. These participants were much more interested in the data about other groups or spaces active in their area, and on the demographic data, which they said would help them run more effective and targeted digital advertising campaigns.

Some testers had difficulty understanding the names of the datasets (“IMD Score” in particular stumping people without a national statistics background), or guessing how the datasets were collected. Perhaps we should be able to display a description for each dataset, or a link to find out more about how the data was collected and by which organisation.

Identifying areas to focus on

Testers were impressed by the suggested map interface for filtering constituencies by all of the datasets in the tool. The filters felt easy to use, and shading by discrete fields like party (rather than shading on a numeric scale) was appreciated as a quick way to identify patterns.

As mentioned above, however, there are UX improvements that could be made, to assist users in quickly diving into, and back out of, the individual constituency view, when they’re exploring the results of their filters / queries. One user wondered whether we could add a search box, to let them pinpoint a given town, city, or constituency on the map, which is a great idea. Another user hit a limitation when trying to show only constituencies where the MP had any one of a number of memberships – this isn’t currently possible, as filters are additive (so always result in fewer matches), and there’s no way to convey “or” in the current interface. Another user requested a way to “clear all” or “reset” the filtered map back to its initial state.

Ultimately the map interface can never do all things for all people, and more data-savvy users will likely fall back to using their own tools once their queries start getting complex. As one tester said, “Eventually you’ll just want to get the data.” When asked what data the user would expect to see in their CSV download, they thought for a second and responded, hesitantly, “A column for every field in the entire database?” – we’ll clearly need to think about how much data is actually included in the downloads – whether it’s just the fields you’re filtering on, or whether we want to enable more offline analysis through other fields in the platform’s database.
One tester felt that the interface could lead to an increased focus on ‘gaps’ in organisations’ current strategies, and might lead to fairer, more diverse climate responses and campaigns as a result. Even at a very basic level, presenting data about places outside London will likely help staff broaden their thinking, and consider alternative viewpoints.

**What would you do next?**

A number of the testers could immediately see how the platform—once filled with real data—could help with their current work. For example, giving local context when supporting the establishment of new local groups:

"Groups Active Nearby would be really useful – so when we’re next setting up a Team Wilder, we can find out who else is working in the area. We want to make sure we’re not tripping up on other organisations."

— User testing participant

A community manager said if the map could show constituencies where a certain type of event (for example, a Great Big Green Week event) had taken place or was scheduled to take place, that alone would make the map a valuable thing to share with journalists covering the story nationally or in each local area.

The community manager also said they’d encourage local group organisers to check the site, for context on what’s happening in their area, and nearby.

One tester said they might start uploading datasets they’d collected—such as “the 150 MPs that are most influential on farming”—so they could be used by counterparts in other organisations.

A campaigns manager at one of the smaller TCC member explained how, in the past, they’ve needed to respond to a political development within 24-48 hours, and have grappled with getting hold of data on constituencies, and pulling it into their own systems, to identify the top 10 activists in each constituency to mobilise. With this tool, they could imagine filtering by the fields they were interested in, downloading the list of matches, and comparing with datasets they hold internally, before approaching the local community groups or the MP themselves. This is exactly the sort of behaviour we’d like to see!
Encouraging cross-organisation collaboration

As identified in our workshops, enabling collaboration within and between organisations is the holy grail for this service, but will not be easy to achieve. We were encouraged, then, by spontaneous comments that came out of our prototype testers, that really got to the heart of how and why a shared data platform could benefit them individually, as well as the movement as a whole.

There was clearly a desire to work in the open, and to share resources, but exposing which organisations are active in an area, or have good connections with an MP, is difficult:

“It's very hard to find out who's targeting which MPs. People are happy to share if you ask, but hard to find the right people to ask in the first place!”
— User testing participant

“It would be amazing to see when other orgs have met the MP. And share when our organisation has met MPs. Maybe we could export a dump of the month's meetings from Vuelio, and upload it to the system?”
— User testing participant

When we were designing the prototype, we’d imagined that users from different organisations would be able to upload and share their own datasets on the platform, and we’d hoped that the shared datasets might help organisations identify more effective target constituencies, or coordinate their actions.

But when they were using the filtering interface, one tester realised that sharing the filtered lists of constituencies could be perhaps an even more valuable tool for knowledge sharing and collaboration:

“Could we save the queries and share them with other people? That would enable a whole new form of collaboration / inspiration between organisations.”
— User testing participant

By saving and linking to the filtered views, users could share not only their list of target constituencies (something they share in spreadsheets) but a list that’s always up to date reflecting the latest data in the platform – such as changes in opinion polling, demographic data, or MP
memberships. And even better, since the map page also shows the filters that are active, users will be able to see how a list has been constructed, learn which datasets mattered to the originator of the list, and maybe discover new datasets they never knew existed. This was a use-case we hadn’t imagined up front, but one that feels incredibly powerful, and totally unique.

Finally, a number of testers mentioned the potential this tool might have for ‘activating’ local volunteers of the less climate-focussed organisations (such as the WI, or National Trust, both The Climate Coalition members – but also, potentially, local organisers of other non-TCC groups and charities). By sharing a treasure trove of data on local activity and opinions, local demographics, and a direct route to policy-makers, the platform gives campaigners from non-climate backgrounds a way to contribute to local climate action, and work climate-positive outcomes into their existing activities.
Next steps

Thanks to the generosity of our workshop participants and prototype testers, we feel we’ve identified clear ways a data sharing platform could contribute to The Climate Coalition’s wider project around enhancing public understanding of climate change, powering up local and national influencing of decision makers such as MPs, and building networks and power in local community groups. The feedback we’ve already gathered will be invaluable as we go on to build and test the first working version of the platform.

There are however still a number of unknowns, which we’ll investigate next:

- **Still limited feedback from local climate groups** – We’ll aim to test more with local groups, especially those who might not be accustomed to data analysis tools.

- **The level of data maintenance / updates we can expect** – The sustainability of the data flowing into the platform will be a major factor in its success or failure. We need to explore both the technical and behavioural measures we can take to encourage data ingress into the system. We will:
  - Identify “core” datasets that The Climate Coalition might maintain, and build a plan for how they’ll do that.
  - Interrogate the data (spreadsheets) that users might want to add – what’s the format? How will we import it?
  - Explore “incentives” for maintaining / curating your own data

- **Saving and sharing queries** – We were (pleasantly!) surprised by this in the prototype testing, and it would be great to understand more about how users would expect this to work. We will:
  - Test the concept with less technical or smaller organisations – would they get value from filters created by the larger organisations?
  - Explore “incentives” for sharing your saved queries – how could we encourage an active community, or more knowledge sharing?

If you’re a campaign organiser, or from any of our other user groups, you’re welcome to check out the prototype yourself, and contribute your own feedback via this form or get in touch.

Otherwise, if you’re interested in updates on this project and many others from our Climate programme, subscribe to our newsletter.