



# PLANETARY HEALTH HUB

Search

<https://planetaryhealthhub.co.uk/climate-mural/>

## Climate Mural

### Possible futures

What future do we want for our children? It's a question many parents ask themselves; but with both technological power and ecological impact increasing at breakneck speed, the world they will find themselves living in will not be the same. Will we destroy the ecological bedrock upon which we can live healthy lives? Or will we pivot and protect it for future generations? And what of the more vulnerable countries in the world where the global majority live?

This mural was commissioned by 26 health professional groups to help show why health institutions around the world consider climate change to be the greatest threat to global health. There are lots of tiny details you might miss. The baby animal partially obscured by our little spiderman is a Lynx – one of our long lost apex predators. The tall buildings in the top left have a signpost saying 'Global North inc' to represent where the bulk of the pollution comes from. And the protected green space in the global north is besieged by approaching fires, to signify our interconnectedness.



Plenty of children came up to the mural whilst it was outside Westminster. All of them gravitated to the image on the right. There are plenty more little details you might have missed- here is a useful key to help you spot them all.



## The short version

1. **Global North Inc:** Represents all the global north countries combined
2. **The fire:** A metaphor for the interconnectedness of the world. Note which way its travelling
3. **Treatment centre** – would you rather be treated, or not get unwell in the first place?
4. **The wall** – Who is it keeping out and why?
5. **Dumper trucks:** A metaphor for all of human rubbish we produce. Solid, liquid and gas.
6. **AWAY rubbish dump:** When we throw things ‘away’ – where is away?
7. **Exhausted health worker:** Why might health workers be (even more) exhausted in this possible future?
8. **Seagull with plastic bag:** This doesn’t need much explaining, sadly.
9. **Dead fish:** What kinds of pollutants do you know that harm fish?
10. **Hedgehog in 6 pack:** Do manufacturers consider harm to the ecosystem when they design products?
11. **Plastic pollution:** How much plastic do you think the fish in the Atlantic ocean ate today?
12. **Chickens in a cage:** What is the best way to spread infection? Coop up animals in the same space.
13. **A gun:** What happens to violence levels when it gets hotter? Higher or Lower?
14. **Mosquitos:** What happens to mosquito breeding rates in hotter, wetter conditions?
15. **‘Type 2’ bottle:** A Type 2 diabetes reference
16. **Seagull in oil:** Who causes oil spills? And who pays for them?
17. **Tree stump:** How many ways that trees benefit humans can you name?
18. **Mobile phones:** Made to break faster than they should
19. **Aeroplane:** A return flight to Rome is more polluting than the annual emissions of a person from Ethiopia, Eritrea or DRC.
20. **Seagull:** Climate change will kill more birds than wind turbines ever could.
21. **Wind farms:** The cheapest form of power is onshore wind.
22. **Houses with solar panels:** A route to energy security!
23. **Apple tree:** Anything grown on a tree is good for the planet!

24. **Breadfruit tree:** The 'tree potato' is climate tolerant, nutritious and tasty.
25. **Prevention centre:** Access to healthcare accounts for only 10% of health. What accounts for the rest?
26. **Thriving crops:** Did you know the default meal choice in New York Hospitals is plant-based?
27. **Community orchards:** What would Hyde Park look and feel like if it were full of fruit trees?
28. **Reusable bottle:** Refuse, Repair, Reduce, Reuse and Rot. These are the 5 Rs. But why not recycling?
29. **Lynx:** A reference to rewilding.
30. **Bees:** We need pollinators to pollinate!

## The longer version

1. **Global North Inc:** Which countries have put most of the pollution into the atmosphere, and which ones have had the biggest environmental impact per person?
2. **The fire:** A metaphor for the interconnectedness of the world. Though the global north may be shielded – by helpful geography, wealth (and much of that obtained through slave labour) etc, it cannot escape the harms of the climate and biodiversity crises.
3. **Treatment centre:** Do we focus on stopping problems from happening, or delay action then have to suffer the consequences? Much of our current ill health is caused by political choices, and that's before adding climate change into the mix.
4. **The wall:** What will the global north do when its environmental impacts cause the displacement of millions if not billions of people? Will it accept its share of the blame and help? Or will it become protectionist, and build a wall, or worse.
5. **Dumper trucks:** A metaphor for all of human rubbish we produce. Not just household waste from our bins, but industrial waste in all its forms, in solid form onto our land, liquid into our water, and gases into our air and atmosphere.
6. **AWAY rubbish dump:** What does away mean? It means another person's country, or our children's oceans or atmosphere. Throwing anything away that will not rot or be recycled, repaired or upcycled means that someone else has to deal with it.
7. **Exhausted health worker:** Working in an underfunded, understaffed NHS is hard enough now. Imagine it when heatwaves get hotter and longer, floods get bigger, and when complex interconnected food and supply chains are broken...
8. **Seagull with plastic bag:** This doesn't need much explaining, sadly.
9. **Dead fish:** Dead zones from industrial fertilisers, ghost nets, industrial heavy metal pollution like mercury, overfishing. There are many ways aquatic life is harmed by human society.
10. **Hedgehog in 6 pack:** 6 pack rings, like many human inventions, were designed without considering nature.
11. **Plastic pollution:** If we keep putting more and more plastic into the oceans what will happen? How toxic are microplastics? We don't know. But we are conducting this experiment on our descendants – as they will suffer the cumulative impact.
12. **Chickens in a cage:** What is the best way to spread infection? Coop up animals in cages or put them in high density pens. Our treatment of animals increases the risks of new pandemics occurring.
13. **A gun:** there is increasing evidence that is suggestive of a relationship between temperature and violence at the population level. Without effective measures, there could be an increase in interpersonal violence as the temperature continues to increase.
14. **Mosquitos:** According to a [2019 study](#) in respected medical journal (PLOS), by 2050, disease-carrying mosquitoes will ultimately reach 500 million more people than they do today. This is because mosquitos replicate faster in warmer, wetter conditions.
15. **'Type 2' bottle:** Type 2 refers to Type 2 Diabetes in a nod to Steve Cutts, the Cartoonist. It references how many of the food and drink products we buy are unhealthy - and cheap, = a political choice.
16. **Seagull in oil:** Who causes oil spills? Oil companies. Who pays? Well that depends where you are. In the USA for example there are strong laws that force oil companies to pay. How about multinational Companies causing damage in less well-regulated global south countries? Google 'Lago Agrio' to find out.
17. **Tree stump:** Trees clean and cool the air, decarbonise the atmosphere, aerate the soil with their roots, help soak up, heavy rain to prevent flooding, provide a home for wildlife, provide food, improve our mental health just by being near them. If you invented a machine that could do all that – you'd win a Nobel Prize.

18. **Mobile phones:** Many iPhones and other mobile devices are designed to break faster than they need to, and not be repairable. Thankfully many companies, such as Fairphone, are building phones which can be more easily repaired.
19. **Aeroplane:** Not long after France took the bold and climate friendly move to ban short-haul air travel, the UK government decided to cut air passenger duty.
20. **Seagull:** In a future we *might* choose seagulls will be far safer from climate threats. In this future, we have ignored the mischief makers who like to say 'but wind farms kill birds, failing to mention that NOT building them will kill far more. And those same people aren't suggesting to cull cats, which kill an estimated 100,000 times more.
21. **Wind farms:** The cheapest form of power is onshore wind. But according to the the BBC, there has been an effective moratorium on onshore wind development since 2016. Why you might ask? Why not ask your MP, or your local councillors that same question?
22. **Houses with solar panels** If we coat rooves with rooftop solar, no extra land is used, and we all gain from UK-based power, which isn't at the mercy of dictators and oligarchs.
23. **Apple tree:** Apples are great for the environment! Firstly because it is from a tree. Secondly because you can buy them from abroad guilt free – because they are largely shipped on boats like oranges and bananas, or grown locally (just avoid the ones that are hot-housed). Thirdly they help keep you healthy!
24. **Breadfruit tree:** Nicknamed the 'tree potato', the breadfruit has been intermittently hailed as a food for the future. It is climate tolerant, nutritious and tasty. And it is a tree, the environmental benefits are huge compared to a field crop.
25. **Prevention centre:** What would a health service look like that focussed more on prevention? It would look like one that institutes a public health campaign on climate change, and lobbied within government to remove the barriers to sustainable choices.
26. **Thriving crops:** Eating a plant predominant diet is one of the best things you can do to drop your emissions. Don't fall for the 'grass-fed beef are OK' line as this is pure misinformation. Many ways of counting emissions ignore the fact that if the cows weren't on the pasture, there would be a nice forest there instead.
27. **Community orchards:** In the book '*The future we choose*' written by two of the main architects of the Paris Agreement, they describe a future where food is everywhere. Climbing up buildings, covering public land, and in community orchards, where people can pick what they need. Not as a replacement for farmers, but a good safety net.
28. **Reusable bottle:** Refuse, Repair, Reduce, Reuse and Rot. These are the 5 Rs. Recycling is nowhere near as important in the grand scheme of things.
29. **Lynx:** A reference to rewilding. Did you know the UK is in the bottom 10% of the most nature depleted countries in the entire world? Our country is meant to have apex predators. Without them some species numbers grow and grow – like deer, and foxes.
30. **Bees:** We need pollinators to pollinate the plants, and must be very careful not to overuse chemicals that can harm them.