

Tackling the climate and nature emergency:

Towards an action plan for North Hinksey Parish Council

In 2019 North Hinksey Parish Council (NHPC) committed to:

- **work to protect and improve local green spaces**, including nature reserves, recreation sites and roadside areas, in order to improve biodiversity and create more space for nature within our community.
- **urgently implement the adopted Climate Emergency Policy** and to help make our community carbon-neutral by 2030.

We are a small organisation with limited powers, so we should use the power we have wisely. We should in all this work be **a force for good** and for **a better environment** and we should demonstrate leadership on these issues through our own actions. This plan sets out actions that we can take on both climate and green spaces– these overlap in various ways.

1. Climate Action

We have committed to:

- Help make our community carbon-neutral by 2030
- Work with our community and other councils to determine and implement the ways in which we can best help to limit global warming to less than 1.5°C

We have so far agreed to:

- Produce a leaflet, poster and webpage (that sets out the situation, why local action is important and responses we need to make) along the lines of ‘Botley acting on climate change’
- Review the environmental performance of NHPC
- Hold a follow up meeting to the 2020 Green Day on ‘Climate Action’

We have also agreed to ‘continue to oppose the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and its associated Growth Arc’. The Expressway plan has seemingly been abandoned – we will maintain a watching brief on the Arc issues.

Our actions on climate

We can address this in three ways:

- The Council’s own impacts
- The Council’s responsibilities
- Encouraging and enabling community and individuals

1.1 The council’s own impacts: Demonstrating leadership through our own actions

We will act to reduce our footprint as a Council (just as District and County Councils are doing) – this will include:

- **Saving energy**

We should ensure all buildings we support are as energy efficient as possible. Getting an energy audit is the first step. A carbon foot-printing tool for Parish Councils is under development with government support by the Centre for Sustainable Energy – we will be contacted when this is available, and will assess how best to use it. While our main built asset – the Seacourt Hall – is a new building we will discuss possible improvements with the Management Committee.

- **Buying green energy**

We will review current energy purchasing by NHPC and ask associated bodies (e.g. SHMA) to do the same with a view to switching to 100% renewable power. There should be no significant cost implications.

- **Producing green energy**

The shift to clean energy is gathering speed across the UK and worldwide. We will review and report on the possibility of installing renewable energy generation, notably heat pumps and solar PV, in buildings we support. Heat pumps benefit from a government grant that will partially cover the cost.

- **Tackling air pollution**

Parts of our parish are badly affected by air pollution (some of the worst problems in south-east England) from the A34. We will seek to work with relevant agencies to tackle and resolve this problem and support local activities that seek to minimise the impacts, especially around the local primary schools.

- **Using green transport**

Employees and councillors should be encouraged to walk, cycle or use public transport or car-share. We will monitor travel made on behalf of the PC and consider whether alternative options such as an electric bike would be more appropriate for such travel. Where a car or van is needed we should consider whether it should be electric, and/or hired from a local Car Club.

- **Minimising waste going to landfill or incineration**

We will ensure that our waste from office work, meetings etc. is recycled or composted.

We will explore setting up local recycling facilities for hard-to-recycle items where Vale DC or others have not done so. We will produce guidance for hirers of local halls on waste minimisation based on the 'reduce, reuse, recycle' hierarchy.

- **Ensuring money is invested wisely**

Across the UK, local authorities have massive investments in fossil fuel companies, despite having declared a climate emergency. Many are now looking to move their funds. Although our investments will be tiny in comparison, we will review our investments and investigate a change to the Unity Trust Bank.

- **Buying green**

Buying local can support the local economy and buying green can help protect the planet, rewarding businesses committed to a better future. We will seek to 'buy green and fair' in terms of any food provided at events, including providing mainly plant-based food and less but better meat and dairy.

1.2 The council's responsibilities: Using our powers wisely

- **Planning and energy use**

The council has limited planning powers, but we will do what we can and ensure that we understand the climate change or nature implications of decisions before we make them. We will seek to ensure that all new developments are of the highest standards and will promote zero carbon homes as a target. We will ask that Vale District Council as the planning authority provide more information about environmental impacts of applications and also seeks the highest standards.

We will build our own skill base on planning and climate issues by sharing up-to-date and relevant information. We will support the Oxfordshire Zero Carbon Homes initiative that seeks to develop dialogue with all sectors of the house-building industry.

- **Actively supporting planning applications for new renewable energy in the area**

Planning decisions are made by the local planning authority, but we will seek to actively support such plans unless there are very clear reasons not to. We recognise that the UK needs to rapidly increase the amount of renewable energy it generates.

- **Using our voice**

Decisions on infrastructure projects are largely made by local authorities, the Growth Board, or by national government. Too many of these decisions will increase carbon emissions and / or harm nature. We will use our voice when possible and collaborate with others as appropriate to oppose environmentally-damaging developments, promoting sustainable alternatives instead.

- **Transport and mobility planning**

We will look to ensure that there are designated safe accessible walking and cycle routes, along with ample safe cycle parking spaces, in all significant planning proposals for our area.

We will support calls for a Local Transport Authority as part of the new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan to allow for regulation and franchising of bus services as a way to progressively improve such services.

- **Neighbourhood Plan**

We have already developed a Neighbourhood Plan to the referendum stage, which when adopted will support many of these aims. When we subsequently look to review the Plan we will seek to develop it to support the aims of this action plan even more strongly.

1.3 Encouraging and enabling action by communities and individuals

- **Promoting practical action by local people**

We recognise that people can often be uncertain about what they can do to reduce their own carbon footprint or support nature. We will work with relevant local bodies to produce an impartial guide that provides information on practical local action and also on accredited local businesses that offer energy and clean transport services, eco-friendly retailers, green builders and landscape companies, etc. We will support and promote the Oxfordshire Together on Climate Change website (change4climate.uk) that offers much relevant advice.

- **Bringing together groups of people for bulk purchase**

The costs of energy saving measures, or installing solar panels, or other renewable technologies such as heat pumps, can be much lower if done in bulk. We will investigate possible demand for such a collaborative initiative and take it forward if there is sufficient interest. A first step will be to explore demand by placing an article in The Sprout.

- **Active travel: walking and cycling**

We will encourage people to reduce their climate impacts by walking and cycling more. This will include development of a guide to local walks and cycle routes. We will seek to cooperate on this with the Oxford-based Centre for Sustainable Health who are exploring similar work.

Encouraging the formation of a Climate Action Group

Communities across the country are taking action in response to the climate and nature emergency. As part of our agreed actions (see introduction) we will host a meeting (in conjunction with the Association for Botley Communities) to discuss setting up a local Climate Action Group. We will engage with relevant youth organisations on this work.

Working with community groups

We will contact relevant community groups across the parish and invite them to feed in to / comment on the action guide that we produce. We will encourage all such groups to encourage their members to take action to reduce their climate impacts singly and together.

2. Nature

We have committed to work to protect and improve local green spaces, including nature reserves, recreation sites and roadside areas, in order to improve biodiversity and create more space for nature within our community.

We will address this in three ways:

- The council's own impacts
- The council's responsibilities
- Encouraging and enabling community and individuals

2.1 The council's own impacts: Demonstrating leadership through our own actions

- **Managing land for nature**

We have responsibility for various green spaces including the allotments, nature reserve etc. We will review these to see how they can best be managed to enhance nature, through e.g. changing mowing regimes. As a first step we will initiate a discussion between the NHPC Environment and Wellbeing, Allotments, and Recreation and Amenities committees. We will invite local experts and relevant organisations to feed in ideas and suggestions for actions.

We will contact landowners with responsibility for other open spaces in and bordering the parish and seek to discuss how such land can be managed to benefit local biodiversity.

2.2 The council's responsibilities: Using our powers wisely

- **Planning and biodiversity**

We will seek to ensure that all significant new developments demonstrate a net biodiversity gain. We will ask that Vale District Council as the planning authority provides relevant environmental information on applications and also seeks the highest standards.

Where new developments in the parish involve tree planting and or other biodiversity activities we will work with local organisations and residents to ensure that these are well maintained in line with any agreements made.

- **Reducing pesticide use and other harmful activities**

We will carry out a brief review to see where / how we can change our actions that may have negative biodiversity impacts (e.g. by using peat-free compost, cutting pesticides). We will share this review and any recommendations arising with relevant bodies.

- **Understanding and improving local biodiversity**

We will consult with relevant local organisations and experts to carry out an informal review of the state of local biodiversity and how we can play a part in improving this. **We will host a workshop**

to discuss the results of this review and may develop a more detailed biodiversity plan as a result of this workshop.

- **Increasing tree cover**

The need to increase tree cover as part of activity to tackle climate change is widely accepted. Various Oxfordshire councils have supported the call to double tree cover The Forestry Commission and others have suggested that even urban areas should aim for at least 20% tree cover (recognising the need for the right trees in the right places). We will review current tree cover and consider how we can support moves to double tree cover and, if necessary, go beyond this to reach the 20% minimum.

We will look to identify appropriate areas of open space where a community woodland could be developed.

- **Protecting water quality**

The Parish borders are defined by the Seacourt and Hinksey streams to the east. We will look to ensure that water quality in these and other watercourses in the Parish is of high quality to benefit both biodiversity and recreational use. In September 2020 the NHPC was informed that in 2019 Thames Water discharged sewage overflow into the Seacourt Stream (from two 'combined sewer overflows') 63 times, for a total of 156 hours.

NHPC has stated that it finds this discharge of overflow sewage to be unacceptable and is taking this matter up with Thames Water and the Environment Agency. **We will continue to press for action and investment to end this situation.**

We will also support the annual 'Water Blitz' organised by the Freshwater Watch initiative.

2.3 Encouraging and enabling action by communities and individuals

Promote practical action by local people

We will work with relevant local bodies (see 1.3) to produce an impartial guide that provides information on practical local action – this will include activities to support and improve local biodiversity. We will also encourage local people to join relevant conservation and community groups and / or take part in activities organised by those groups and to develop 'green gardening' approaches.

We will discuss the possibility of joining the OxClean litter campaign and encourage local people to take part in this.

3. Delivering and promoting this plan

The initial activities set out within this Plan involve:

- a) production of materials as previously agreed and budgeted
- b) review of various current activities

c) discussions within NHPC and with local stakeholders on next steps.

An initial three-month timetable is set out below. This will lead to a longer-term programme – an initial budgetary allocation for next year will be set to support these activities.

We will contact relevant councillors and officers at County and District level to inform them of this plan and of our objectives.

We will set up meetings on climate and biodiversity to engage with local people to discuss how this plan may be taken forward.

Implementation of the plan will be the responsibility of the Environment and Wellbeing committee. The committee will report annually to full council on the progress of the plan.

This Plan agreed by full council at meeting 15/10/2020

Climate and nature emergency action plan for North Hinksey Parish Council *Initial activity plan*

This plan sets out activities to be carried out from Oct. 2020 to January 2021.

Month 1.

Organisational activities

- Produce a copy of this plan and an explanatory note for use on our website and other media, in discussion with the Communications Committee
- Produce an article for The Sprout
- Set a date for a meeting on biodiversity issues of the three relevant committees as above
- Draft the agreed leaflet for local people
- Start work on production of the advice guide by inviting involvement of local organisations
- Set a date for a meeting on local climate action

Reducing our impacts

- Set a timetable for the various reviews of current practice as set out in this Plan.

Community and external activities

- Contact relevant council staff and councillors and start discussion with Vale District Council planning officers to assess how far climate and active travel issues are now built into the planning process.
- Contact local conservation and environment groups to share this plan with a view to discussion and participation in meetings

By Month 3.

Organisational activities

- Produce and distribute leaflet and hold public event
- Hold joint discussion between the Environment and Wellbeing, Allotments, and Recreation and Amenities committees.
- E&W Committee to review progress
- Develop councillor briefing on planning and climate issues and responsibilities.

Reducing our impacts

- Review current energy use and purchasing by NHPC and
- Review current waste management, act as appropriate, and produce guidance for hirers of local halls on waste minimisation.
- Review current banking and investment activities
- Review travel made on behalf of NHPC and consider possible action

Community and external activities

- Comment on the proposed new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan
- Report on possible demand for bulk purchase scheme
- Hold meeting re green spaces and biodiversity with relevant local bodies
- Set up process to monitor major developments that may affect our parish
- Produce guide to practical local action, and promote the Oxfordshire Together on Climate Change website
- Start discussion on develop guide to local walks and cycle routes.
- Explore and encourage the formation of a Climate Action Group
- Support the Oxfordshire Zero Carbon Homes initiative.
- Explore joining the Oxclean litter campaign