

October 2019



20 actions parish and town councils can take on the climate and nature emergency

Parish and town councils may not be as powerful as local authorities but they can “do their bit” in addressing the climate and nature emergency and be a force for change.

1. [Be a force for good](#)
2. [Demonstrate leadership through your own practical actions](#)
3. [Use your powers wisely](#)
4. [Acknowledgements](#)

This guide complements Friends of the Earth's template Local Climate Action Plan¹ .

In this guide we identify actions that parish and town councils can take on climate change and nature. Its purpose is to support those of the 10,000 local councils across England and 750 community councils in Wales who want to "do their bit" in addressing the climate and nature emergency.

Be a force for good

Encourage the formation of Climate Action groups.

Communities across the country are coming together to take climate action in response to the climate and nature emergency. Climate Action groups will encourage and support you to take local political action, build positive community solutions, and join together to demand national action. Parish, town and community councils should encourage and support the formation of these groups. Friends of the Earth will provide resources, training and advice to climate action groups (see takeclimateaction.uk).

Actively support small and large planning applications for new renewable energy in the area.

Planning decisions will be made by the local planning authority, which needs to hear from those that support the applications. The UK needs to increase the amount of renewable energy it generates by around eight-fold.

Promote practical action by local people.

People can often be at a loss about what they can practically do to reduce their own carbon footprint or support nature. An impartial local guide that provides information on accredited local businesses can be invaluable and help keep money in the local

economy. The guide could include information on local accredited energy assessors² and renewable energy installers for solar panels, batteries, EV charging points and heat pumps³, eco-friendly retailers, green builders and landscape companies, etc. It can also encourage sustainable transport options.

Bring together groups of people for bulk purchases.

The costs of installing solar PV, or other renewable technologies such as heat pumps, should be much lower if done in bulk, street by street, or area by area. A town or parish council can bring together local homeowners and businesses to develop such a scheme – it's a widely used model in the Netherlands and places such as Suffolk and Frome in the UK. Bulk purchases of energy audits or energy insulation is also possible. Transition Streets is an example of this approach⁴.

Develop and promote lift-sharing scheme.

By convening local businesses and car-sharing schemes, such as the social enterprise Liftshare, it's possible to help local people reduce the carbon pollution from car use, save money and foster new friendships. An analysis by Liftshare suggested that 92% of people commuting to work in over 200 locations lived close enough to be able to share a car to work. Lift-sharing may often be a solution for people when public transport, cycling or walking to work isn't. Car-sharing schemes for non-commuting journeys should also be promoted⁵.

Use your voice.

Decisions on infrastructure projects are largely made by local authorities, Local Economic Partnerships, or by national government. But too many of these decisions will increase carbon emissions and / or harm nature. Use your voice when possible to oppose high-carbon developments, promoting sustainable alternatives instead. Press local authorities and MPs to demand national changes to bus services regulations, so all areas can regulate buses as London does, and urban profit-making routes can cross-fund loss making rural routes.

Demonstrate leadership through your own practical actions

Save energy.

Ensure any council buildings are as energy efficient as possible and any street lighting uses well-directed LED lighting. Getting an energy audit is the first step. Loans for projects in England that have a payback of less than five years are available through Salix funding⁶. Projects with longer term paybacks should still be carried out.

Produce green energy.

Install renewable energy generation, like heat pumps and solar PV, at council buildings. Heat pumps benefit from a government grant⁷ that will partially cover the cost. Several energy companies provide a smart export tariff, which pays for any electricity generated that isn't used by the building, including offering top prices if the solar PV is used in conjunction with a battery⁸. Funds can also be raised through Salix loans⁹ or through crowdfunding. Buildings using renewable energy should also be used as a showcase to help local people see these technologies first-hand, particularly less familiar technologies such as heat pumps. An electronic display showing how much energy has been generated and how much money and CO2 emissions saved is one way of demonstrating the benefits.

Reduce pesticide use and other harmful activities.

It's possible to reduce activities that harm wildlife, from using peat-free compost to shunning pesticides and ensuring light pollution is controlled. Glastonbury Town Council has stopped using glyphosate weed killer and instead uses a hot foam system¹⁰. These steps alone are not enough to protect and restore nature but they're an important first step. To encourage others, promote the actions you're taking, for example use signage on council-owned land where you use peat-free compost.

Manage land for nature.

Parish, town and community councils can have responsibility for allotments, bridleways, burial grounds, commons and open spaces, and village greens. All of these can be managed to enhance nature, particularly through changing mowing regimes. Friends of

the Earth and Buglife have produced a guide to developing an action plan for helping pollinators such as bees¹¹ . Buglife's B-lines project aims to support the development of a network of wildlife friendly corridors¹² . Friends of the Earth is piloting a crowd-funded postcode gardener project to help people green the streets where they live¹³ .

Increase tree cover.

Friends of the Earth is campaigning for the UK to double tree cover. The Forestry Commission and others have suggested that even urban areas should aim for at least 20% tree cover¹⁴ . Parish, town and community councils should aim to double tree cover and, if necessary, go beyond this to reach the 20% minimum. Much of this will involve encouraging and supporting landowners to take part in tree planting. The Tree Charter, developed by the Woodland Trust, provides excellent guidance on how to increase tree cover. The National Association of Local Councils website provides case studies where it has been used¹⁵ .

Buy green.

Buying local can support the local economy and buying green can help protect the planet, rewarding businesses committed to a better future. Buying green electricity helps develop new renewable energy and ensures the council isn't supporting dirty energy financially. Friends of the Earth has identified Ecotricity, Good Energy and Octopus as the greenest energy companies. Buying green can also extend to any food provided at events, including providing mainly plant-based food and less but better meat and dairy.

Use green transport.

Employees and councillors should be encouraged to walk, cycle or use public transport or car-share. The council should provide bikes or electric bikes for staff as they carry out any work-related trips. It should also provide zero-interest loans for buying bikes. Where a car or van is needed it should be electric only.

Minimise waste going to landfill or incineration.

In your own operations, ensure all your waste is recycled or composted, but also consider setting-up community recycling facilities for hard-to-recycle items when the

local authority hasn't done so, for example in partnership with Terracycle¹⁶. Bisley Parish Council has set up a community composting scheme. The best approach for waste minimisation is reuse (eg, reusable cups) or avoiding unnecessary purchases.

Ensure money is invested wisely.

Across the UK, local authorities are investing tens of millions of pounds each into fossil fuel companies, despite having declared a climate emergency. Although town council investments will be tiny in comparison, the council should still ensure any council funds are invested safely in low-risk sustainable banks or investment funds.

Use your powers wisely

Ensure you know the climate change or nature implications of decisions before you make them.

It isn't credible to accept the need for rapid action on climate change and nature and then make decisions without knowing whether they'll be harmful or helpful. Requiring every decision to be well informed is common sense as well as good practice. This should extend to demanding that the planning authority provides you with this kind of information when consulting you.

Designate sites within the Neighbourhood Plan for trees, renewable energy and nature restoration.

In practice, the development of 90% of Neighbourhood Plans is led by town and parish councils working hand in hand with their communities. The Neighbourhood Planning process is far from perfect and very time consuming, but it offers the community the opportunity to show it means business on protecting and enhancing the environment for future generations.

Use the Neighbourhood Plan to require new homes to be energy efficient, nature friendly, and located close to public transport and amenities.

Given the climate and nature emergency, it's unfortunate that the government doesn't require all new homes to be as sustainable as possible. Neighbourhood Plans will identify sites for future housing and should push for these to be zero-carbon (eg,

Passivhaus standard) and nature friendly, even though the local planning authority may seek to override this aim. Homes should also be fitted with renewable energy. Homes need to be located close to amenities and public transport to avoid car dependency.

Designate safe walking and cycle routes in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Identify safe walking and cycling routes and where necessary work in partnership with district and county councils to deliver them. The Propensity to Cycle tool identifies the huge potential for increasing cycling in all areas of the country, particularly with good quality infrastructure, such as segregated cycleways and cycle-parking, and with the use of E-bikes¹⁷ .

Use differential car-parking charges to support low-carbon vehicles.

Any carparks run by the council should offer low cost or free car-parking to electric vehicles and dedicated spaces with electric charging points.

Acknowledgements

This list of actions has drawn on ideas kindly shared by others including Simon Pickering (Green councillor, Stroud), Robert Vint (Extinction Rebellion, Totnes) and Chris Gittins (Timsbury Parish Council). All three also kindly provided comments on an earlier draft, for which I thank them. Any mistakes or errors remain mine.

1. Friends of the Earth, September 2019, Get your council to adopt our climate action plan, <https://takeclimateaction.uk/climate-action/get-your-council-adopt-our-climate-action-plan>.

2. A register of accredited assessors is available at <https://www.epcregister.com/searchAssessor.html>.

3. To qualify for a government grant (Renewable Heat Incentive) to help with the costs of installing renewable heat such as solar thermal panels or heat pumps it's necessary to use a certified installer. The list of certified installers is at <https://mcscertified.com/find-an-installer/>.

4. See <https://www.transitionstreets.org.uk>.

5. There are a number of car-sharing schemes across the country, including national and local providers. Somerset County Council has a guide on setting up a community car-share

scheme, <http://www.travelsomerset.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Car-Scheme-Toolkit-All-You-Need-to-Know-DW-Edit-2.doc> .

6. Webpage accessed 18 Sept 2019, <https://www.salixfinance.co.uk/index.php/loans/parish-councils>.

7. Ofgem has guidance on the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive at <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/environmental-programmes/non-domestic-rhi>.

8. For example, Octopus was the first to offer a tariff to pay for exported energy (which will be metered) <https://octopus.energy/outgoing/>. Other companies will follow suit.

9. See <https://www.salixfinance.co.uk/loans/parish-councils>.

10. The company WeedingTech has produced a case study, but you might want to check on the current situation with Glastonbury Town Council,

https://www.weedingtech.com/case_studies/glastonbury-town-council/.

11. Buglife and Friends of the Earth, Helping pollinators locally, <https://www.buglife.org.uk/sites/default/files/Helping%20Pollinators%20Locally.pdf>.

12. Buglife B-lines Hub, <https://www.buglife.org.uk/b-lines-hub>.

13. See <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/nature/10x-greener-towns-and-cities>.

14. Urban Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee Network, England's Urban Forests: Using tree canopy cover data to secure the benefits of the urban forest,

https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/2109/FR_FC_TreeCanopyData_leaflet.pdf.

15. NALC website, The Tree Charter, <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/treecharter>.

16. Terracycle website, <https://www.terracycle.com/en-GB/>.

17. Propensity to Cycle tool, <https://www.pct.bike/>.

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

FOR COUNCILS

**A 50-point plan to tackle the
climate and nature emergency.**

What our council will do:

Putting our climate at the heart of decision-making

Our goal is to ensure that our climate and nature restoration goals are front and centre in all decision-making and investments, and inclusive engagement with citizens ensures that the changes made are sustainable.

Tick

| | | |
|----------|---|--|
| 1 | Require councillors to identify whether the recommendations put to them would help or hinder climate, air pollution and nature plans. | |
| 2 | Identify both a councillor at cabinet level and a lead officer as Climate and Nature Champions who are required to publish a bi-annual independent and audited report to the public on progress in meeting climate change and nature targets. | |
| 3 | Use additional decision-making approaches for complicated or contentious choices (such as representative Citizen Assemblies/Citizen's Juries, participatory mapping and budgeting, etc). | |
| 4 | Set interim and measurable targets for our council to achieve net zero greenhouse reductions and meet nature restoration goals. | |
| 5 | Align all our council statutory and non-statutory plans, policies and guidance with respective carbon reduction pathways and nature restoration plans, including procurement. | |
| 6 | Review and improve how we involve citizens in our existing decision-making processes. | |

Raising money

Our goal is to have sufficient resource to invest in the changes needed to restore nature and meet climate goals, so that our council can reap the dividends and deliver our fair share of greenhouse gas reductions.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 7 | Introduce a workplace car parking levy and/or similar initiative to fund sustainable transport. | |
| 8 | Raise money from the UK Municipal Bonds Agency for low carbon infrastructure. | |
| 9 | Use legal and planning mechanisms such as Section 106 agreements, Community Infrastructure Levy and other mechanisms to fund climate actions and nature restoration projects. | |
| 10 | Implement licensing of the private rented sector to cover enforcement costs of minimum energy efficiency standards. (Applicable in England only) | |

Protect the most vulnerable

Our goal is to ensure that those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change are properly supported and protected.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 11 | Identify the most vulnerable people in the areas most at risk of flooding and high heat levels and target adaptation policies, actions and spending to these areas. | |
| 12 | Ensure that voices of the most vulnerable communities are also represented in council decision-making and council-citizen deliberations. | |

Buildings

Our goal is to ensure all homes are well insulated to minimum EPC C level and eradicate fuel poverty as fast as possible, and make a proportional contribution to the 1 million eco-heating heat pumps that need to be fitted in the UK each year.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| 13 | Retrofit council-owned properties with high levels of insulation. | |
| 14 | Help owner-occupied homes be more energy efficient, for example by supporting energy companies to target fuel poor or vulnerable households with insulation. | |
| 15 | Enforce minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector. | |
| 16 | Require higher standards than current national standards for privately built new homes. | |
| 17 | Enforce building standards. | |
| 18 | Require homes built on council land to be extremely energy efficient, using the Passivhaus standard or similar. | |
| 19 | Develop a heating and energy efficiency strategy for the area. | |

Transport

Our goal is to reduce air pollution to meet World Health Organisation levels, match European best practice in the use of buses, cycling and walking, and ensure all vehicles are zero emission.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 20 | Enable the rapid shift to electric vehicles by installing Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points. | |
| 21 | Prioritise transport investment into cycling, walking, trams and public transport, such as electric buses. | |
| 22 | Put in place Clean Air Zones, with charging if needed. | |
| 23 | Reduce car use through measures such as promoting car-sharing, re-regulating bus services and constraining road space. | |
| 24 | Require all taxis and buses to be electric. | |
| 25 | Deliver a rapid transition of the council's own fleet to electric. | |
| 26 | Require deliveries to the council to be by electric vehicles or bike (e.g. through setting-up a distribution centre for onward deliveries by clean vehicles). | |
| 27 | Introduce differential charges for parking permits or other car related charges. | |
| 28 | Reduce the need to own and use a car through managing developments in the local plan. | |

Power

Our goal is to enable and support the growth and use of green energy, ensure energy is not wasted, and prevent the development of new fossil fuel extraction.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 29 | Identify areas suitable for renewable energy in the local plan. | |
| 30 | Switch street lighting to well-designed and well directed LED lights. | |
| 31 | Reduce energy used by the council in its own estate. | |
| 32 | Require the integration of renewable energy such as solar thermal, PV or heat pumps in council developments and, as much as possible, within private sector developments. | |
| 33 | Support the development of renewable energy and energy storage. | |
| 34 | Oppose fracking and other fossil fuel extraction, and where opposition on fracking has been overturned, support peaceful protest. (Applicable in England only). | |
| 35 | Divest from fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy projects. | |

Waste

Our goal is to be a zero waste area where all waste is minimised, recycled or reused as part of a circular economy approach.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| 36 | Send zero waste to landfill or incineration. | |
| 37 | Use food waste according to the food waste hierarchy of prevent, reuse, recycle, and ensure remaining non-recyclable biodegradable waste to generate biogas. | |
| 38 | Adopt circular economy waste policies in relevant plans and contracts. | |
| 39 | Promote community sharing and reuse. | |
| 40 | Ban the use of single-use plastic in council offices and premises. | |

Influencing others

Our goal is to encourage and support other entities with their contribution to the fight against the climate emergency.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 41 | Ensure the Sub-national Transport Body strategy is in-line with carbon budgets. (Applicable in England only) | |
| 42 | Use council memberships of Local Enterprise Partnerships to ensure all their decisions are in-line with the climate reduction pathway and nature restoration plans. (Applicable in England only) | |
| 43 | Provide particular support to SME businesses to access funds and expertise for reducing carbon pollution. | |
| 44 | Use influence with schools and others to ensure that meals are delivered in accordance with the official Eatwell Guide on healthy eating and the majority of options on menus are healthy and plant-based, with less and better meat. | |

Land-use

Our goal is to restore nature to help drawdown carbon pollution from the atmosphere and to ensure everyone has access to nature in nearby green spaces.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| 45 | Double tree cover on council-owned land, update local planning strategies to double tree cover across the Local Authority area, and ensure existing trees are properly protected in order to store carbon, support nature, improve soils and water quality, and aid flood protection and urban design. | |
| 46 | Protect existing local green spaces, green belt and locally designated nature sites. | |
| 47 | Manage council-owned land and road verges to increase biodiversity and drawdown carbon pollution, including through reduced pesticide use and increased planting of wildflowers. | |
| 48 | Develop new quality green spaces in areas where they don't exist, particularly in neighbourhoods where people are particularly vulnerable to heatwaves and/or are deprived of nature. | |
| 49 | Produce a nature and ecosystem restoration plan to reverse and restore habitats and species and ecosystem quality and function. | |

Campaigning

Our goal is to make our voice heard by the UK government and secure increased devolution to local level and increase democratic control.

Tick

| | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 50 | Work with other local authorities and allies to secure more regulatory powers, fundraising powers and finance to deliver on our aspirations (for example, as those identified by Friends of the Earth), and join forces with others to push for a climate action plan that is commensurate with the climate and nature emergency. | |
|-----------|---|--|