

Should Broomhaugh and Riding Parish Council declare a Climate Emergency?

Scientists make it clear - we're facing a climate emergency

On 8th October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a vital report on the state of climate science. They warned that if the planet warmed by 1.5C there would be some devastating consequences, such as the loss of most coral reefs, and increased extreme weather such as heatwaves and floods. Yet the consequences of allowing 2C warming would be truly catastrophic. Given that the planet is currently heading for 3-4C warming, keeping to 1.5C requires a radical shift across energy, land, industrial, urban and other systems to reduce emissions, unprecedented in history for its speed.

On 29th October 2018, the Chancellor, Philip Hammond, set out his budget. It did not mention climate change. Since then, thanks to a movement of people from all across the UK, climate change has been steadily climbing the political agenda at all levels of government.

In November 2018, major cities Bristol and Manchester both passed motions that declared a 'climate emergency' and set targets aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030 and 2038 respectively. Their decisions have since been echoed by councils across the country, with over 100 councils passing climate emergency motions so far. On 1st May 2019, the UK Parliament followed the lead of these local councils, unanimously approving a non-binding motion to declare a climate emergency and calling on the government to increase its ambition to adopt more ambitious targets for reaching net zero emissions. [https://www.campaigncc.org/councils_climate_emergency. Accessed 7.11.19]

What can we do?

There is little point in us declaring a climate emergency unless we are proactive.

Friends of the earth have published a document suggesting 20 things that town and Parish councils can do [<https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/print/pdf/node/140>, accessed 7.11.19]. I have picked out some of these: the suggestions are in normal type and our thoughts on what can be are in italics.

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).

We have taken a first step here already and David McKenzie will present their Ideas back to the Parish Council.

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.

We could do this and also make comments on planning applications about energy efficiency of new homes and large extensions being planned. Should be zero carbon now.

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.

We can use our voice in correspondence with the local authority, NCC and also the North of Tyne Authority.

Produce green energy. Install renewable energy generation, like heat pumps and solar PV, at council buildings. Heat pumps benefit from a government grant 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 battery. Funds can also be raised through Salix loans or through crowdfunding. Buildings using renewable energy should also be used as a showcase to help local people see these technologies first-hand, particular 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.

We don't have Council Buildings but could we encourage the Village Hall to investigate these sorts of Schemes? And perhaps the new Sports pavilion?

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 system. 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.

We could consider these steps and reduce pesticide use and use peat free compost in our planting.

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 bees. Buglife's B-lines project aims to support the development of a network of wildlife friendly corridors. Friends of the Earth is piloting a crowd-funded postcode gardener project to help people green the streets where they live.

We could consider these steps and review our mowing regimes.

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 cover. 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 used.

At the very least we could plant a tree for everyone that is felled and maybe aim to plant a few more. Trees absorb carbon.

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 Teracycle. The best approach for waste minimisation is reuse (e.g., reusable cups) or avoiding unnecessary purchases.

There was a suggestion in the village meeting of a crisp packet recycling scheme. Maybe we could look into setting up rigid plastics collection point.

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.

We do this

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.

We should make this last demand on planning applications sent for our comments

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.

We have not opted for a neighbourhood plan but if we do so in the future we should require new homes to be energy efficient. We could also make that comment on planning applications.