



ALTON TOWN COUNCIL CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY 2020

Background

National Picture

The report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published in October 2018, stated that we have just 12 years for “*ambitious action from national and subnational authorities, civil society, the private sector... and local communities to deliver the “rapid and far-reaching transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, so we can prevent tipping points where we no longer have the ability to avoid extreme weather events.”*”

According to the South East Climate Alliance “*We have only a few years to act on a massive scale to avert irreversible climate change that will profoundly affect our lives. Yet somehow, while some important steps have been taken, this degree of urgency is not yet reflected in our individual actions and that of our local and national governments.*”

‘A Climate Emergency Declaration issued by a body in authority, such as a government or local authority, can be a powerful catalyst for community wide action if paired with a clear action plan’.

The Climate Emergency movement started in Darebin, Australia. They declared a climate emergency in August 2017 and developed a climate emergency plan to galvanise action. The movement has been gathering pace ever since and was launched in the UK after Bristol declared in November 2018. Since then, 220 of the UK’s 408 Principal Authorities (County, Unitary, Metropolitan, London Boroughs, District), (October 2019) with widespread support across political groups, have declared a climate emergency, committing them to take urgent action to reduce their carbon emissions at a local level. Many have set 2030 as a target date for going carbon zero, 20 years ahead of central government’s 2050 target.

Town councils have a key role to play in this. Policies and actions can have a big effect on many aspects of the environment in areas such as:

- Local transport
- Housing policy
- Waste management
- Energy generation and use
- Public information
- Parks and landscape management

Action on climate change can deliver many local benefits, including improved health, increased equity and social cohesion, economic opportunities and increased resilience

As a recent report from The Town and Country Planning Association and the Royal Town Planning Institute states:

“While we need to work nationally and internationally to secure progress on addressing climate change, we must also galvanise local action. Local and combined authorities are at the cutting edge of the climate change challenge because they have responsibility for decisions that are vital to our collective future. Many of the adverse impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat, flooding or water scarcity, will result in costs to businesses and householders, and solutions to the problems they pose need to be developed locally. Adaptation to the risks presented by climate change is key to future-proofing our existing communities and making sure that new developments maintain and enhance the health and wellbeing of local communities, as well as their competitiveness.” From ‘Planning for Climate Change: a guide for local authorities’ (2018)

The Local Picture in Alton



Energy Alton is a volunteer Community Interest Company, offering advice on saving energy and carbon emissions, which grew out of the Greening Alton and Holybourne campaign, which started in 2009.

Since 2010, they have offered to the public free home energy surveys and in 2012 they purchased a camera to offer free thermal imaging. They also helped families to obtain free loft insulation while it was available.

In 2014 Energy Alton won a Community Renewable Energy Award from the National Energy Foundation for installing a 10kW solar photovoltaic system on Alton Library. From 2016 they have engaged in supporting other potential renewable energy schemes, e.g. schools.

Through their regular programme of public meetings, special events and links with other organisations, they also promote other sustainability issues such as climate change, energy-efficient transport and travel and effective waste management, including single use plastics

Climate Change: A Survey of Alton Residents' Views, 2019 (carried out by Energy Alton)

As public concern over the impact of climate change has risen, Energy Alton decided it would be valuable to have a baseline understanding of local people's views, to help with local action planning and to share with decision-makers in local and national government.

A short questionnaire was developed based on previous government surveys. The survey was undertaken door-to-door by a team of 17 volunteers. The target achieved was 200 completed forms. Roads from different areas of the town, representative of Alton's social demography, were allocated to volunteer surveyors. All replies were totally anonymous.

The key findings were that:

- 92% of those surveyed are convinced that the world's climate is changing: 66% very and 26% fairly convinced.
- 90% of respondents are worried about climate change: 44% very and 46% fairly worried.
- Concern about climate change is higher amongst Alton residents than the national average. The Dept. of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Public Attitudes Tracker published data in May 2019 that 80% of people were concerned about climate change (45% fairly concerned and 35% very concerned). <http://www.yougen.co.uk/blogentry/3124/What+does+the+public+think+about+climate+change'3F+/>
- Nearly half (45%) said that they are prepared to change their behaviour "a lot" to limit climate change; a further 44% said they were prepared to change "a little".
- In response to the question, "Who or what is most likely to help you do more to reduce your carbon emissions?" the top choice was government legislation, the second choice was TV programmes and the third was newspapers and magazines. Social media was next on the list.

Many people said they lived relatively low-carbon lifestyles (by choice or because they could not afford to do otherwise) or were already taking action to reduce their carbon emissions. Three quarters of the sample said they were reducing energy use in the home and over half said they were reducing car usage, eating less meat and buying second-hand goods or sharing goods. About half the sample never or rarely fly (national data suggests that, in any one year, over half the population take no flights; 70% of flights in/from GB are taken by 15% of people). The more affluent tend, on average, to have higher greenhouse gas emissions because they can purchase and consume more.

"What other factors should the government be addressing?" There were thoughtful responses to this question, suggesting frustration with government inaction, for example (amongst many issues raised):

- Great concern about the inadequacy of public transport services and the lack of alternatives to car use.
- The need for much stronger action on the reduction of single-use plastics.
- Confusion with local recycling services and wanting a uniform, easily-understood system.
- A concern about the accuracy and trustworthiness of information. TV programmes by David Attenborough were specifically mentioned as trustworthy. Social media is however often not trusted.
- People want suggestions for practical action they can take: concrete information on practical ways to reduce their carbon footprints.

Energy Alton said they were *"really heartened by the great interest, concern and willingness to take personal action to reduce carbon emissions demonstrated by the respondents. Some felt that it was difficult for individual action to have an impact without concerted and consistent government policy. "It doesn't feel like they are doing anything at the moment" was a typical comment. There is a paradox expressed by respondents – government is considered to be doing very little, but it is government that would help people to do more."*

Alton Climate Alliance.

The 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference was held in Paris in 2015. Its objective was “...to achieve, for the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations, a binding and universal agreement on climate, from all the nations of the world.”

This landmark event was celebrated with a major rally in support of these vital talks in London on 29 November, along with events in cities all over the world. An energetic group from Alton Climate Alliance attended the rally bringing support and the commitment of dozens of Alton Residents who had the day before on 28th November come together in the Public Gardens to demonstrate their support for the Paris Climate Conference and its aims.



Alton residents at the Public Gardens in 2015.



Alton Climate Action & Network (ACAN) was set up in 2019 by a group of concerned Altonians to share information and nurture action in the town on the climate emergency.



Alton Climate Demonstration September 2019 outside the Town Hall

Today, Alton Climate Action and Network exists to increase awareness of the need to act with urgency across communities, across countries and across continents and has working groups set up to focus on the following areas:

- Food
- Green Spaces
- Transport
- Energy
- Less (new) stuff
- Building Standards
- Lobbying and Campaigning
- Information and Outreach.

With an established exchange economy already taking shape in Alton ranging from the Toy Library, Resurrection Furniture and the work of Mens Shed, to new projects like the Repair Café the Community Cupboard, local residents are already engaging and receptive to reducing their consumption of goods, sharing and repairing.

Alton Town Council

Whilst local authorities do not have a statutory duty to reduce emissions in line with the Climate Change Act, during 2019 and with cross party support, Alton Town Council made the impact of climate change and how to address it a key priority for the Council. This started with a climate change workshop in July 2019 involving councillors and contributors from Energy Alton and Alton Climate Action & Network. The formation of a Task and Progress Group took place shortly thereafter.

Even before the climate change motion was put to Members, the Council had already taken a proactive approach to environmental improvement through its open spaces. Specifically, town centre bedding planting has started being replaced with pollutant absorbing perennial planting which also reduces water consumption. Wildflower planting has already taken place during 2018 at Windmill Hill, with Flood Meadows following on in 2019 and the creation of additional wilderness areas such as that at Barley Fields. Also, the council has extended its ownership of open spaces, adopting land at Barley Fields, Chawton Park Road and the Lower Field at Will Hall Farm to preserve for future generations as well as looking to adopt the 10 Principles of the Woodland Trust Tree Charter.

The Council has also joined the Refill Campaign in 2019 (<https://refill.org.uk/refill-alton>) after recommissioning the "other" Miss Bells Fountain as a public drinking water station last year.

Alton Town Council Climate Change Emergency Motion Wording.

Alton Town Council at its Full Council Meeting on the 31st October 2019 resolved to:

- 1 Declare a climate emergency*
- 2 Progress towards making Alton Town council carbon neutral by 2030, including undertaking a green audit of the council to ensure that weight is given to the environmental and sustainability impact as well as cost to all council functions and activities.*
- 3 Set up a Task and Progress Group to facilitate the progress towards carbon neutrality of the Town Council.*
- 4 Create a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to submit to Full council within 6 months.*
- 5 work with partners and other local authorities across the district and region to deliver these new goals through all relevant strategies and plans and drawing on local and national best practice*
- 6 To actively lobby the government to provide the additional powers and resources needed to meet the 2030 targets*
- 7 To aspire, through the strategy, to create an ethical procurement framework to ensure suppliers reduce their own carbon footprint*
- 8 To make climate strategy a consideration on all aspects of policy making*

Climate Change Strategy Vision.

The wording of the motion included the creation of a key document, a Climate Change Strategy and accompanying Action Plan. The objectives of this strategy are designed to enable the Council to pursue policies which will have a positive impact on the future sustainability of the Town for its residents, visitors and businesses, have been summarised as follows:

- 1) Alton Town Council will lead by example, focusing on reducing its own carbon footprint, adopting policies and practices to reduce its consumption of resources and minimise its impact on the environment.
- 2) Alton Town Council will seek to promote opportunities for residents, schools and businesses to become involved with initiatives which will have a positive impact on changing consumption habits in our community both now and in the future and which engender a strong civic pride.
- 3) Alton Town Council will seek to influence decision makers in the adoption and promotion of policies to provide sustainable alternatives to traditional construction, infrastructure and transport models.
- 4) Alton Town Council will promote the principles of responsible tourism in Alton as a "Destination Town" for walking and cycling, minimising negative environmental impacts of tourism and making positive contributions to the conservation of our landscape.
- 5) Alton Town council will seek to promote schemes to reducing energy consumption and emissions from existing homes and businesses in the town by promoting energy efficiency measures, renewable energy sources and behaviour change.

Key Target Influencers

In seeking to deliver the objectives of the strategy and satisfy part 5 of the Town Council motion: “ *work with partners and other local authorities across the district and region to deliver these new goals*” a number of key sector influencers have been identified who will be instrumental in shaping policy and decision making which will impact the future viability and deliverability of the wider strategy beyond the Town Council’s own estate. These are:

East Hampshire District Council/Hampshire County Council Planning Policy Teams – Local Plan policies, Neighbourhood Plan, building regulations, minerals and waste plans. The National Planning Policy Framework requires local plans to “*help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience ... and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure*” (Paragraph 148)

Damian Hinds MP – Lobbying for increased funding through Parliament and through the work of the All Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group.

Hampshire County Council Strategic Highways – speed limit reduction, pedestrianised or low emission zones, increase and improved cycling and walking infrastructure

East Hampshire District Council Parking Team – increased electric car changing points. Lower car park charges for electric cars

Hampshire County Council Public Transport – improved community transport, increased car sharing. Local Transport Plans.

Stagecoach – increased frequency and number of services, use of low emission vehicles

Hampshire County Council Education – walking and cycling to school, cycle storage

Developers – designing zero carbon homes and offices, landscape led design and green architecture

Enhance East Hampshire Team (EHDC) – lobbying for funding from the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). (2/3rds LEP funding is on roads projects)

Supermarkets – encouraging promotion shop bikes (Waitrose), additional secure cycle storage, use of cargo bikes and similar for deliveries.

Alton Matters – encouraging schemes which reduce waste and plastic consumption, particularly, bags and bottles; replacing with sustainable options. Promoting reuse and refill schemes.

Industrial Estate Businesses – assisted by EHDC Economic Development, to encourage car sharing and cycle to work schemes as well as updating machinery with lower energy alternatives

Challenges

In considering the delivery of the action plan items in the strategy a number of potential constraints need to be considered.

- Finance and resourcing - for the Council and for individuals. Environmental improvement, retrofitting and waste reduction will have economic benefits in the longer term but requires a high level of initial investment which is currently not backed by government funding. Options are currently limited to bidding for funding, use of CIL, borrowing, use of reserves or precepting.
- Skill sets and resourcing. Officers and indeed councillors are not experts in this field and therefore should not be expected to demonstrate extensive knowledge although learning will increase over time. Officers also have considerable remits and capacity needs to be acknowledged when seeking to deliver such a wide ranging strategy action plan.
- Availability of land. Increasing demands upon the council to increase wildflower spaces, areas set aside for tree planting and wilderness areas compete with multi use open spaces and areas for sport and exercise. The amount of land available to the council is finite.

- Public perception and changing “mind set”. Whilst scientific warning and public concern are at the forefront of national and international media, at a local level there is still a level of scepticism which needs to be sensitively considered. There is also a great deal of pejorative rhetoric which can be associated with climate change which needs to be dispelled with softer, more inclusive language.
- Sphere of influence and direct ability to effect change. Whilst it is important that any action taken by ATC is beyond simply improving its own estate (e.g. the buildings they own) and encompasses all the wider community, the Town Council does not have direct powers and authority over the whole of the public realm.
- Conflicting priorities for the Council. Cost versus environmental impact. There will be conflicts, eg. town centre cost of parking; should it be free to encourage footfall on the High Street, or increased to dissuade people using their cars to drive into town.
- Law of unintended consequences. e.g Infrastructure improvements versus environmental impact. Promoting measures that increase greenhouse gases – for example, increasing road capacity through advocating improved road capacity encourages more traffic and therefore increased greenhouse gas emissions.

Action Plan

The Action Plan to deliver the vision objectives are included as an appendix to this document.

Because action on climate change brings many co-benefits it is also important in addressing other areas within our community including health and wellbeing and how we promote the town. As such this strategy should be read alongside the Council’s overall Corporate Strategy which brings all these elements together. Research by Imperial College identified the numerous co-benefits from action on climate change.¹ The public health benefits from action on climate change are particularly significant.

All items included in this works programme are perceived to be deliverable and viable and should be seen as a pathway to progress, not a final solution. Technology, science and thinking will evolve and impact the plan over time.

Useful resources

www.ClimateEmergency.uk

<https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/33-actions-local-authorities-can-take-climate-change> (Friends of the Earth)

<https://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/transport/local-authorities/local-government-support-programme>

<https://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/resources/tools-calculators>

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/grantham-institute/public/publications/briefing-papers/Co-benefits-of-climate-change-mitigation-in-the-UK.pdf> (The Gratham Report)

<https://treecharter.uk/get-involved.html> Become a tree charter council

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¹ <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/grantham-institute/public/publications/briefing-papers/Co-benefits-of-climate-change-mitigation-in-the-UK.pdf>