

Parish communities climate engagement & action project

WeCAN Learnings Report

A report by the Centre for Sustainable Energy
and Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis
for Winchester City Council

March 2022

WinACC

centre for sustainable energy

Context

Winchester City Council (WCC) has set a target to become carbon neutral by 2024 and for the wider district to be carbon neutral by 2030.

In March 2021, the council commissioned the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) and Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis (WinACC) to deliver the Winchester Climate Action Network project (WeCAN).

WeCAN sought to build the foundations of a network of parish councils and local communities taking action on the climate crisis across Winchester district.

The timeframe for delivery was March 2021 to March 2022.

This report summarises key results and findings from the project and insights for further action. It is also informed by an end-of-project learning workshop conducted between the three delivery partners (WinACC, Winchester City Council and CSE).

The report is split into three sections:

1) Key results and findings from the project

2) Insights for action going forward

3) Lessons learnt in each of the four project activity areas

a) Climate action survey of parish councils and communities
b) Parish carbon footprint reports and webinars
c) Community Action Planning Workshops
d) Support to strengthen communication and engagement at parish level

1. Key results and findings from the project

A majority of parish councils in Winchester district are already taking climate action or would like to act in the future.

- Vanguard: 8% (4/48) of parish councils participated in all 4 activity areas (see Appendix I for details).
- Majority: 69% (33/48) of parish councils engaged in one or more project activities; of the 28 parish councils who responded to the project survey, 22 said they were already taking climate action or would like to act in the future.
- 25% (12/48) of parish councils did not engage in any of the project activities.

Priority issues for parish councils in Winchester district:

- Priority environmental issues are traffic and air quality issues, and loss of green space and biodiversity.
- Priority areas for future action are promoting green travel choices, increasing tree cover and promoting sustainable waste behaviour. Existing action across the parish councils is diverse; the most cited was encouraging residents to make domestic energy efficiency improvements. The key areas where there was desire for further action in the future was increasing tree cover and promoting sustainable waste behaviours.
- There was a plea for support and guidance. A lack of capacity and necessary powers, and the Covid-19 pandemic, were cited as key barriers to action amongst parish councils.
- Key asks of WCC are: show leadership and act with more urgency; improve infrastructure for sustainable transport and waste minimisation; and develop more initiatives to encourage residents to live more sustainable lives.

There is a good base of community-based organisations across the Winchester district taking climate action.

- Twenty-one organisations engaged in one or more project activities. These organisations included: churches, local recycling groups, local food partnerships, and a study and learning centre (see Appendix I for full details).
- The majority of these were already taking action to address climate change. Actions were diverse, with the most cited being the promotion of sustainable waste behaviours. A key area where there was desire for further action in the future was the promotion of sustainable food growing and consumption practices.
- A lack of capacity and local and national policies were cited as key barriers to action.

Parish carbon footprints can help to give parish councillors, clerks and community-based organisations greater clarity and confidence in their climate actions.

- A carbon footprint report was produced for each civil parish and urban ward to highlight carbon emissions information on a territorial and consumption basis.

- 27% (13/48) of parish councils and 8 community-based organisations attended the carbon footprint webinars to explore how to best interpret, understand and use the reports' content.
- Feedback from the webinars highlighted that the reports: are powerful in revealing clearly the most carbon-intensive activities; and help parish council and community actors with decision-making about where to prioritise actions, giving them confidence in their decisions. Further support is needed with how best to communicate the content of the footprints to the wider community and use it in engagement activities.
- It is clear that, in many cases, there is a discrepancy between the environmental issues which communities want to act on (e.g. plastic waste), and where the greatest carbon savings can be made (e.g. changing travel behaviour).

There is great value in bringing people together.

- Two online 'Action Planning Workshops' were held in October 2021 with 35 attending across both days. 27% (13/48) of parish councils were represented.
- Participants found the workshops useful and empowering and, most importantly, that having the opportunity to speak and work with others who had overlapping goals provided motivation in their work, and reduced feelings of 'tackling a huge issue alone'.
- The event was a springboard for some participants, who went on to work jointly with other attendees or put into practice an action from the workshop.
- Bringing together parish council actors with community actors created opportunities to share learnings of how each can support the other. Parish councils fed back that they would also benefit from more opportunities to network solely with other parish councils – to share learnings and experiences of how parish councils' levers of influences can be effectively used to support climate-positive actions.
- The potential for in-person gatherings during the project period were restricted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst virtual gatherings are more accessible for many and can mean greater attendance levels, in-person meetings must complement these; in-person gatherings allow for more informal networking and can build a stronger sense of a collective.

'Comms bundles' facilitate greater dissemination of local communications to inform and encourage climate-positive actions.

- 10 attendees from the workshops signed-up to receive monthly climate communications 'bundles'.
- The provision of 'raw' content enabled them to more easily disseminate media content (e.g. via community newsletters, social media, websites) to promote climate action.
- An additional outcome from the project's communications strand was the decision that the communications teams from WinACC and WCC will continue to meet each month to ensure ongoing coordination and collaboration on climate-related communications.

2. Key insights for action going forward

Drawing on the findings and learnings from across the project's activities, the following are key insights to inform action going forwards. WinACC and WCC have a critical role to play across these actions.

1. The vanguard – there is a core of parish council and community actors engaged in and taking sustained climate action. WinACC and WCC should support this core with the skills, confidence and mechanisms through which they can guide the interest and engagement of their communities to be focused on effective climate action. The climate activities of this engaged core – including the lessons learnt and community benefits – should be communicated more widely (e.g. to others less actively engaged). Critically, this core needs to be supported, strengthened, and feel well connected to each other.
2. Facilitate the coming together of engaged parish councils (e.g. convening regular meetings for all parish council environmental leads), to share learnings and encourage collaboration, and connect to and give support to less active but willing parish councils.
3. Undertake targeted engagement with those parish councils who did not engage at all with the project to understand why, and if there are barriers that can be addressed.
4. Using data from the carbon footprint reports, target engagement with areas with higher per-household carbon footprints and larger populations, to prioritise effort where there is potential for greater carbon reductions.
5. Find a means to enable connecting, learning and sharing of stories and expertise via a digital platform. This will support the building of an effective community climate action network, but also build a positive story to share beyond WeCAN of a learning and doing community that others can feel inspired by and connect to.
6. To continue to build knowledge and use of the *Impact* carbon footprint reports and action planning tools used in this project, understanding that not everyone is ready for the same levels of engagement at any one point. Create and promote case studies of how communities have used their footprint information in engagement activities.
7. Continue with cross-Winchester coordination over sustainability communications (e.g. having a shared sustainability topic each month) and build ambition to coordinate with other districts across Hampshire.
8. Focus on collaboration between different funded sustainability projects across the district.
9. WinACC brings a strong core of committed actors, with a wealth of experience, and it is already building networks and facilitating actions through its Action Groups and other project activities; it needs to be supported to continue in this community-level momentum building role.
10. WCC has a critical leadership and example-setting role to play; communicating the actions it is already taking on climate, and what it is doing to facilitate communities to participate, is critical in building buy-in and community-level action. Grassroots community engagement and the provision of support must continue to be core to WCC's ongoing carbon neutrality activities. WCC successfully securing a place in the UK:100 Local Climate Engagement (LCE) programme is an important resource for this going forward. Clarifying responsibilities for community climate engagement and ensuring continuity of those involved will help WCC get the most from the programme.

3. Lessons learned in each project activity area

A. Surveys for parish councils and communities

The purpose of the surveys was to get a picture of the extent to which the parish councils and community groups/organisations across the Winchester district are (or are not) engaged in climate action; to understand what the priority environmental issues are for the communities; and to understand what barriers they experience in undertaking action and what support they need to enable action.

The surveys were co-created by CSE and WinACC. The surveys were sent to all parish councils, and a range of environmental groups across the district. 28 parish councils responded (representing 60% of parishes) and 15 community-based organisations (see Appendix I for details).

The full findings from the surveys are detailed in two survey reports.[1]

Key learnings

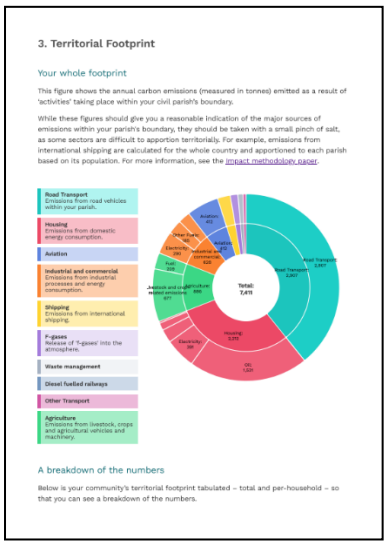
- The surveys provided a good baseline for the project and informed the subsequent project stages. Going forward it would be helpful for WinACC to be able to re-run the survey yearly to compare year-on-year change.
- Even with a high level of enthusiasm and optimism for action, parish councils need guidance, peer support, and case studies to inspire and guide their work.
- More in-depth and bespoke support is needed to be able to reach the parish councils that did not engage with the project.
- If carbon savings are the priority, there is a degree of mismatch between where communities would like to act, and where the greatest carbon savings would be made.
- If communities are to be inspired to act, then they need to see commitment reflected back to them in action from the council.

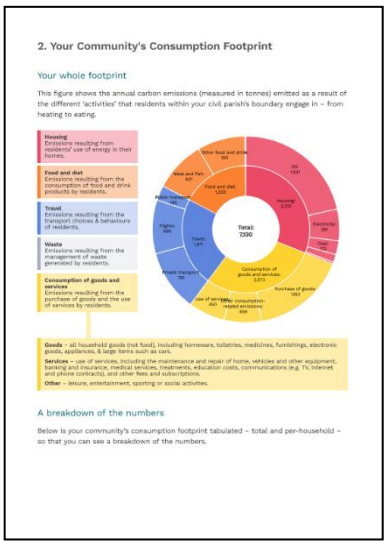
[1] Parish Council and community organisation survey reports: https://www.winacc.org.uk/wecan/

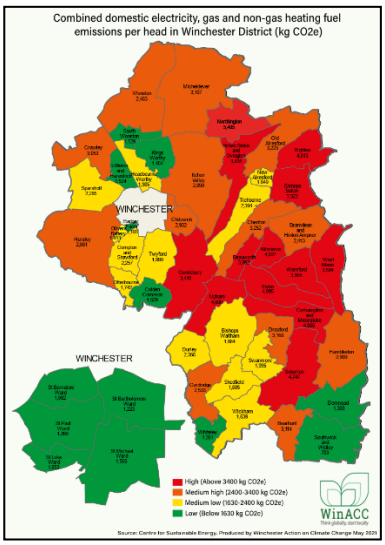
B. Parish carbon footprint reports & webinars

Using CSE's carbon footprinting tool, *Impact*, a carbon footprint report was produced for each civil parish and urban ward to help guide climate action. This data was shown on a territorial and consumption basis[2] (see Figure 1 below). These reports were sent to each parish council, parish and ward councillors, and each community-based organisation or group that responded to the survey. The reports were hosted on the WinACC and WCC websites.

Figure 1 Extracts from parish carbon footprint reports







Bob Whitmarsh (WinACC) also undertook detailed analysis (using *Impact*) to reveal the domestic electricity, gas and other heating fuel-related emissions by parish across the district (see Figure 1).

Three webinars were held in May and June 2021 to provide advice on how to best interpret and understand the reports' content, answer questions, think about next steps for action, and highlight key WinACC initiatives which residents can engage with to tackle emissions highlighted in the footprint reports.

In total, 64 people attended the webinars. Attendees included a mix of parish council clerks, councillors, district council officers, and community-based organisations and groups (see Appendix I). Feedback from the webinars highlighted that the reports were detailed and interesting and the webinars did a great job of explaining the complexity of the data. The reports have helped to give parish council and community actors confidence in their actions.

[2] A territorial footprint captures the carbon emissions that are generated within a particular area, including from industry, agriculture and transport. Comparatively, a consumption-based footprint captures all emissions caused by the activities of residents of an area, regardless of where geographically they occur.

Key learnings

- Webinar attendees expressed surprise about the scale of emissions from certain areas – notably consumer goods and services, and air travel. This demonstrates the importance of revealing the carbon impact of the breadth of activities we all engage in.
- Some report recipients found it frustrating that the footprint information was modelled (not based on primary data). The webinars were a good opportunity to answer questions on this, explain how the footprint had been developed, and encourage attendees to focus on what the report was telling them about prioritising and directing action.
- More emphasis could have been placed on supporting parish councils and communities with how to communicate the content of their carbon footprint reports with their wider community, and how to use the information to stimulate community climate action.

Impact

- In a few cases parish councils cited their footprint reports in communications material – e.g. Itchen Valley Cllr Steve Percy wrote a piece for his parish magazine about his community's footprint and key climate actions to focus on as a result. He also joined an Impact event organised by Exeter University and CSE exploring ways in which communities can use footprinting information to stimulate community climate action; Action on Carbon in Twyford created a 2-sided leaflet, using the carbon footprint for their parish, to distribute at their community Green Fair and other events.
- WCC created two project videos, hosted on their YouTube channel, which used key findings from two community carbon footprint reports as a basis for the videos' messaging on how footprint information can be used to guide and prioritise community climate action.

C. Action Planning Workshops

Two 'Action Planning Workshops' were held in October 2021 with around 35 attending from both parish councils and community-based organisations across both workshops. Event promotion included: pieces on WCC's website, in their project videos, and in their internal YCN newsletter; through CSE's social media channels; and through Winchester Green Week, as part of the first national Great Big Green Week, and WinACC social media.

The workshop included the following sections: creating a climate action plan; climate communications; and collaborative working across parish council, district and county council, and community actors.

Feedback from the Action Planning Workshop participants told us that:

- Participants found the workshop both useful and empowering and that having the opportunity to speak and work with others from across the Winchester area taking, or wanting to take, climate action, gave them motivation in their work.
- An overarching message from both workshops was the importance of bringing people together from across the district to share ideas and learning, promote collaboration, and reduce feelings of isolation.
- Some participants found the workshop overwhelming in terms of the scale of the problem being tackled, and the number of areas where action was needed.
- The event was a springboard for some participants, who went on to work jointly with other attendees or put into practice an action from the Action Planning Workshop. Examples of follow-on actions include: Sparsholt parish council has established a climate change sub-group and agreed the terms of reference; Itchen Valley have started a campaign to encourage residents to participate in the Queen's Green Canopy initiative; a community group had made contact with other green groups in their area to explore ideas for action; a Hampshire County Council attendee reported that they are now urging the public to think about a personal carbon plan and linking readers to the New Leaf Alresford and WinACC websites; and a community group member got in touch with WinACC to find out more about their sustainability sub groups, made contact with their Parish Council to try and find out whether anyone had attended WeCAN, and met up with another green group in their area.
- Some participants found the event too long, with 5 hours being too big an ask of people's time. An alternative approach would be to stagger the activities of the Action Planning Workshop over a few days or weeks, creating more of a 'course' format. This would also have supported momentum building.

From running the Action Planning Workshops we can conclude that:

- There is great value in bringing together people who want to take climate action or are interested to take action; this bringing together needs to not demand too much of people's time and needs to happen regularly to maintain momentum and build a community across the district.
- A valuable next step could have been to have directly linked up attendees who are at the same stage in their journey, or who are interested in working on the same issue, or in the same position in their parish council (one attendee made the great suggestion of convening a regular meeting for all parish council environmental leads).
- Having both parish councillors and communities together had the advantage of reinforcing the point that climate action requires input from across all sections of the community. However, there was some feedback that an opportunity for just parish council actors to come together could allow more bespoke support and information.

D. Communications support

As part of the WeCAN project, monthly communications 'bundles' (on a different sustainability topic – see Figure 2 below) were offered to all who had engaged with the project's activities, to distribute amongst their networks, through social media platforms as well as through more traditional media such as parish magazines, posters and local newsletters. Ten attendees signed up to receive the content. CSE created the core content for the comms bundles; they were then sent to WinACC for the addition of more locally relevant content (e.g. timely actions, such as consultations open for response from WCC) and for dissemination. WinACC also aligned the topics of their monthly open meetings with those of the comms bundles.

CSE facilitated conversations and coordination between the Communications Officer at WCC and WinACC's Communications Manager to help align the topics across the district. In the run up to COP26, this coordination also led to all parties using the same hashtag in social media content to help build a sense of collective action and momentum in the run up to this important event. These communications teams continue to meet monthly to ensure ongoing coordination and collaboration.

Having received the comms bundles, some people then used the content for dissemination via their local media channels. Examples include: the Shedfield Parish Magazine (topic: COP26); Oliver's Battery's community newsletter (topic: COP26); West Meon and Warnford Parish News (topic: travel); and Oliver's Battery parish council website (topic: food).

Figure 2 Communications bundles plan

	November 2021	December 2022	January 2022	February 2022
Theme	COP	LOCAL TRAVEL	FOOD, DIETS AND WASTE	RENEWABLES and COMMUNITY ENERGY
Key Messages	Action on climate change	Active travel and health benefits	Share your best recipes.	Domestic renewables
	How to lobby and influence local MPs	Local transport infrastructure, updates on Winchester's new plan	Community fridges and allotment waste sharing	Funding sources availble
	How to have conversations with friends and family about the Climate Emergency	Local cycle infrastructure & post covid funding/policy	Some nuanced meet reduction messages	What are heat pumps? What is solar?
	Reflections on COP	Flying - boost the british economy by staying local	Local production	CSE advice leaflets & videos
		Support UK businesses, staycation		
Audiences	Wide audience +	Wide audience + Young professionals	Wide audience + families	Wide audience + able to pay, landlords,

Key learnings:

- There is a desire for communications content. The provision of 'raw' content enables community and parish council members to disseminate media content to promote climate action. It is critical that this content is accessible to the breadth of possible users.
- It is clear that a district-wide comms approach is hugely beneficial for events, campaigns, and the sense of working together on a common cause or aim.
- Creating the communications content is a time-intensive task; it would be advantageous to be able to reach out to other parish councillors and community-based organisations working on climate communication and share resources so that this effort doesn't sit solely with WinACC but is shared.

Appendix I: Project engagement by parish councils & community-based organisations

	Responded to survey	Attended carbon footprint webinar	Attended Action Planning Workshop	Signed up to comms bundles
Parish Councils				
Badger Farm				
Beauworth				
Bighton				
Bishops Sutton				
Bishop's Waltham				
Boarhunt				
Bramdean and Hinton Ampner				
Cheriton				
Chilcomb				
Colden Common				
Compton and Shawford				
Corhampton and Meonstoke				
Crawley				
Curdridge				
Denmead				
Droxford				
Durley				
Exton				
Hambledon				
Headbourne Worthy				
Hursley				
Itchen Stoke and Ovington				
Itchen Valley				
Kilmeston				
Kings Worthy				
Littleton and Harestock				
Micheldever				
New Alresford (town)				
Newlands				
Northington				
Old Alresford				
Olivers Battery				
Otterbourne				
Owslebury				
Shedfield				
Soberton				
Southwick and Widley				
South Wonston				
Sparsholt				
Swanmore				
Tichborne				
Upham				
Twyford				
Warnford				
West Meon				
Whiteley				
Wickham				
Wonston				
% of Winchester parish councils	58%	27%	27%	15%
Community organisations				
Winchester Friends of the Earth				

Perlins Community Project				
	Responded to survey	**Attended carbon footprint webinar**	**Attended Action Planning Workshop**	**Signed up to comms bundles**
The Sustainability Centre, Hampshire				
Hampshire Climate Action Network				
Winchester Food Partnership				
Winchester Green Week				
Christ Church Winchester				
MOD DCLPA Worthy Down				
Winchester CTC				
Lara's recycling/waste group				
South Wonston Recycling				
Winchester Litter Pickers				
Winchester BID				
St Mary's church, S.Downs Gateway benefice				
New Leaf Alresford				
Citizens Advice				
Three Saints Church				
Olivers Battery Countryside Group				
St Peters Church, Winchester				
Community First				
PeCAN				
Action on Carbon in Twyford				
Diocese of Winchester				
Residents				
Residents (not associated with a parish council or community organisation)		11	6	1