Parish and Town Councils: acting on climate change

Introduction

These 21 ideas about what parish and town councils are doing and could do to contribute to reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other “greenhouse gases" which cause global heating and climate change came from workshops of parish councils in Winchester District.

More from the National Association of Local Councils:

- What can local councils do on climate change (2021)
- Climate Change Case Studies (2020)
- Local councils’ powers to address or reduce climate change: existing powers and future opportunities (2020)

Set an example

1. Parish councillors are community leaders. Local people respect what they say. That’s why many of the ideas aim to demonstrate that the parish council thinks that it is important to act on climate change. For example, by putting it in the newsletter, taking it to a parish meeting, reducing the parish council’s own footprint.
2. Pledge to cut the council’s own carbon footprint. to demonstrate and publicise the parish’s commitment to action on climate change.
3. Put climate change onto the agenda of a council meeting, or the annual meeting.
4. Agree to draw up a plan of what the council will do, make this plan part of the annual (business) plan for the coming year, and monitor and review progress against the plan at least twice a year.

Cut the parish council’s own carbon footprint

5. Use “Low Carbon Water” at parish meetings – from the tap, not a bottle. If you serve food, make it mostly or entirely meat-free.
6. Change to LED low energy light bulbs in the parish hall and other buildings.
7. Buy parish energy from a sustainable supplier of green electricity energy i.e. Good Energy; Green Energy; or Ecotricity 100% scheme.
8. Agree an environmental procurement policy, so that the parish buys from local firms which source their food or materials locally, and pay attention to sustainability in their own materials and production methods.
9. Get advice on energy management and carbon reduction in your assets (halls, land). WinACC can suggest how this could be done.
10. Identify the parish council’s own energy use, auditing all the parish’s buildings and land-holdings. Identify how to make savings. In some cases this will make immediate savings, e.g. switching off lights. In other cases, an investment now will deliver savings longer

term, e.g. solar panels to make your own electricity. You might be able to share the cost and the returns with nearby buildings such as schools.

11. Make any new parish building meet the highest energy-saving standards. And encourage others locally – for example, the village hall committee – to do the same when they invest in new buildings or renovations.

Planning

12. Include climate change as one of the threats listed in the parish/town plan. Does it increase the chances of flooding? What are the opportunities? For example, is there a local site for a renewable energy scheme that would benefit the community?
13. Influence what is done by Winchester City Council. Use the parish statutory role in consultation and advice, helping to set the agenda for planning issues.
14. Put climate change on the checklist of issues to consider when asked to comment on applications for planning permission. Will the proposed change of use or development contribute to climate change? Is new housing well insulated, with low energy consumption? Will residents be able to shop locally? Is there public transport nearby?
15. Reduce the level of street lighting in the area – directly, if parish council lighting; indirectly, by influencing HCC.

How individual parish councillors can help

16. Individual parish councillors have authority in their community. Each of them, individually, can make a big difference by telling people that climate change is real, and telling them what they have done themselves to cut their own carbon footprint. WinACC can help with information.

Information and education

17. Use parish communications – newsletters, notice boards, emails, posters, website - to spread the message that climate change is everyone's responsibility, with tips about how we can cut our carbon emissions. WinACC can send draft articles for newsletters to incorporate or customise.
18. Host talks or events to inform people, for example about what people can do to your home to reduce energy consumption.
19. Set up a community renewable energy scheme – for example, solar panels on the community hall roof. WinACC can point in the direction of help and advice.

Work alongside local people

20. Support your local group if there is one. WinACC coordinates Winchester Climate Action Network (WeCAN for short). If you are in Winchester District, WeCAN can help you set up a local group. To find out more about how this can support you and your community, email WeCAN@winacc.org.uk or click here.
21. Even if you aren't in Winchester District, you can sign up for the WeCAN monthly newsletter, and click here to find out more about what WeCAN groups have done.
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