



Parish and Town Councils: acting on climate change

“The Earth’s climate is changing. Global temperatures are projected to continue rising, bringing changes in weather patterns, rising sea levels and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather for the UK. Although individual weather events cannot be directly attributed to climate change, we know the kinds of impacts we may face because we have some experience of them already. Because of inertia in the climate system, past emissions mean that some changes are now inevitable up until the 2040s... This could mean average summer temperature increases in the South East of England, of 2.3°C (by the 2040s).

“Although we expect some significant changes to the climate after this time, the extent of the changes will depend heavily on current and future efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is vital that we plan and prepare for these changes ... Taking simple steps now will reduce the costs and discomfort for all of us in the future.” (Adapting to climate change: A guide for local councils, published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and ACRE April 2010)

Introduction

1. Winchester District Strategic Partnership Climate Change Action Plan aims to reduce Winchester’s carbon emissions by 30% between 2004 and the end of 2015. The Winchester District Strategic Partnership targets are the minimum reductions which scientists believe are required to keep global warming below 2%. If warming increases above 2%, it is likely to get to the point where it is self-multiplying and irreversible.
2. This is an important issue for parish councils. Winchester District Strategic Partnership High Quality Environment Group invited representatives from parish councils to a consultation meeting “Climate Change – the opportunity” on 23 April 2009, with the aims of briefing parish councillors about the Winchester District Strategic Partnership Climate Change Action Plan, and consulting on the role of parish councils in tackling climate change.
3. The Winchester District Association of Local Councils organised a follow-up session in October 2009 which discussed what actions local councils in Winchester District are taking, with the aim of exchanging good practice.
4. This paper is based on those two events, updated in 2013. It sets out what parish councils are already doing or could do to contribute to reductions in the emissions of carbon dioxide and other “greenhouse” gases, which cause global warming and climate change.

5. Parish councillors are community leaders. Local people respect what they say. Many of the ideas below will demonstrate that the parish council thinks that it is important to act on climate change – putting it in the newsletter, taking it to a parish meeting, reducing the parish council's own footprint.

How a parish can set an example

6. Join WinACC and pledge to cut the parish council carbon footprint. This costs nothing, and demonstrates and publicises the parish's commitment to action on climate change.
7. Put climate change onto the agenda of a parish council meeting.
8. Discuss climate change at the parish annual meeting.
9. Agree to draw up a plan of what the parish council will do; to make this plan part of the parish's annual (business) plan for the coming year, and to monitor and review progress against the plan at least twice a year.
10. Ask for advice on energy management and carbon reduction from WinACC.

How individual parish councillors can help

11. 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:
 - "Top Tips for cutting your carbon footprint" – a free leaflet. also on WinACC's website
 - the "Frequently Asked Questions" on WinACC's website gives answers to questions people ask about climate change
 - join WinACC as an individual or household member– it costs nothing.

Information and education

12. 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 parish newsletters to incorporate or customise.

Getting local people involved

13. Involve local people in encouraging and advocating best practice. Support your local group if there is one; work with WinACC to set up a local group if there isn't winacc@winacc.org.uk.
14. Talk to businesses in your parish about how they can save money and cut their carbon reductions by auditing their energy use and planning how to manage it more efficiently. Business help from CarbonSmart Winchester <http://carbonsmartcertified.co.uk/the-programme/winchester-certification-programme-2>.

Planning

15. Include climate change as one of the opportunities and threats listed in the parish plan, and identify what needs to be done. This will include, for example, considering whether it increases the chances of flooding; it also includes what can be done to reduce carbon emissions.
16. 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.
17. 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?

Cutting the parish council's own carbon footprint

18. Use "Low Carbon Water" at parish meetings – from the tap, not a bottle.
19. Change to LED low energy light bulbs in the parish hall and other buildings.
20. Buy parish energy from a sustainable supplier of green electricity energy i.e. Good Energy; Green Energy; or Ecotricity 100% scheme.
21. 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 heat water. You might be able to share the cost and the returns with nearby buildings such as schools. You can get a loan through the Green Deal.
22. Make any new parish building meet 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.
23. 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.
24. Reduce the level of street lighting in the area – directly, if parish council lighting; indirectly, by influencing HCC.

Cutting energy use in the home

25. Encourage local people to use low-energy light bulbs, increase their home insulation and take other actions from WinACC's *10 Top Tips* <http://www.winacc.org.uk/reduce-your-footprint/top-tips> .
26. Invite WinACC to bring its energy-saving road show to your event, and/or give a public talk about what you can do to your home to reduce energy consumption, and about the "feed-in tariff" income you now get from renewable energy. Parish council endorsement will encourage people to come.

Cutting energy used in producing and transporting food

27. Encourage people to grow their own fruit and vegetables – for example, have a meal at community events with food which people grew in the parish.
28. Promote local shopping.
29. Organise a landshare scheme – people with large gardens they can't manage share with other local people who use them for vegetables
30. Let local people grow food on unused bits of parish land that aren't used for amenity (e.g. verges).
31. Ensure allotments are used – if necessary, pairing up with a neighbouring parish. When they are, create more allotments.

Cutting energy used in travel

32. Promote low speed in the village – smart driving uses less petrol.
33. Promote local shopping.
34. Check your schools have an up-to-date Safer Route to School / school travel plan which encourages people to walk or cycle to school.
35. Encourage lift-sharing / car-sharing; set up a parish council-sponsored initiative e.g. using parish newsletters.
36. Provide cycle racks.
37. Improve walkways
38. Set up the parish's own community transport e.g. a mini-bus to the post office and shops, so that people travel together instead of each on their own car. This is a service to those without transport as well as a carbon-saver. Colden Common has done this.
39. Use the power of wellbeing to make change happen.
40. Find out who has already done things you are trying to do, by asking WinACC.

Parish Councils are invited to learn from each other's experiences and share good practice. For details of events for parish councils, contact Steve Lincoln at Winchester City Council slincoln@winchester.gov.uk 01962 848 110. WinACC contact is Susie Phillips susie.phillips@winacc.org.uk, 01962 827083.