

BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

Biodiversity Duty on Parish and
Town Councils and Climate Action
for Smaller Councils



Biodiversity Duty and Climate Action for Smaller Councils

- Introduction
- Biodiversity Duty
- Climate and Nature Action for Smaller Councils
- Resources to increase engagement and deliver action
- Q & A



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Climate Officer

Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC)

South Warwickshire Local Climate Engagement Programme

The Great Collaboration

WALC



- WALC represents 180+ parish and town councils
- Climate Officer: South Warwickshire
- Stratford-on-Avon District
 - 80+ parish and town councils: 3 out of every 4 electors lives outside Town of Stratford-upon-Avon
- Warwick District: more “urban”, 20 parish and 4 town councils

WALC x LCEP

Local Climate Engagement Programme

- 2019: Warwick District declared a Climate Emergency
- New portfolio: Environment & Climate Change
- New post: Climate Change Programme Director
- 2020: Climate Change Action Plan with input from climate experts but also from Warwick's People's Enquiry
- Proposed merger: Warwick and Stratford District did not go ahead, work continues on a South Warwickshire Local Plan

WALC x LCEP

- [Local Climate Engagement \(LCE\)](#): uses training, mentoring, peer learning and hands-on support to assist local authorities in engaging communities on climate decision-making.
- 2022: Warwick District, WALC and Stratford-on-Avon [secured funding](#), one of 21 LA's out of 76
- Lancaster City Council also successful: Engaging residents on travel, one of five themes identified by a people's jury undertaken in 2021. see p. [31-35](#) See [details on action plan and Jury](#)
- Warwick/Stratford: develop and deliver a rural community engagement programme
- Phase 1: training programme by [Involve](#) with [Climate Outreach](#) District Councillors, Officers, Parish and Town Clerks and Councillors, WALC and community action groups.
- Phase 2: pilot [with three rural communities](#) implemented different public engagement activities in Alcester, Henley-in-Arden and Marston Sicca. [Watch the video](#)

WALC x LCEP

Council and Community Action

Climate (and Nature) Officer

- Two days/week with communities to develop action plans or projects
- Signpost expertise, case studies, funding: building trust and local connections **to navigate the “information jungle”**
- Working with Local Nature Partnership: workshop on [Local Nature Action Plans](#) to feed into Warwickshire’s Nature Recovery Strategy
- **Have you connected with your [Local Nature Partnership](#)? Town and parishes can play a role**

Engaging on Climate Change

Three-quarters of adults in Great Britain worry about climate change

In the survey, people were also asked to describe in their own words how they feel about the future of the environment.

Some common themes were identified in the responses, such as:

- people's concern for their family and future generations
- anxiety and helplessness
- the expense of making eco-friendly changes.

Source: **Office for National Statistics**, October 2021 - Data on [public attitudes](#) to the environment and the impact of climate change, Great Britain

Engaging on Climate Change

Climate change can feel **overwhelming** as a topic.

At a time when public concern about the environment, and climate change in particular, is at a record high, it is vitally important to retain a **positive narrative** to engage people and communities, and demonstrate how they **can take part** in this journey of climate (and nature) action.

Source: Sustainable Towns & Cities. Ashden's mission is to accelerate transformative climate solutions and build a **more just world.**

Engaging on Climate Change

Talking about solutions also helps us reach those who would normally be disengaged from climate issues. “Climate change” can be a polarising term, but clean energy, lower pollution, less waste, energy security, or lower bills are not.

Almost everyone likes clean energy, and no one likes pollution. Let’s talk about them more.

Source: Dr Hannah Ritchie, [*Not The End of the World: Surprising facts, dangerous myths and hopeful solutions for our future on planet Earth.*](#)

Engaging on Climate Change

Britain Talks Climate asked participants

‘Which of the following impacts of climate change are you most worried about over the next 10 years?’

The top 5 most frequently cited climate impacts were:

- Harm nature and wildlife
- Cause my bills and other costs to rise
- Increase the risk of floods
- Have a negative impact on my children/grandchildren’s future
- Increase the risk of heatwaves

(Only 13% chose ‘not worried about climate change affecting my life in the next 10 years’ when answering this question.)

Source: Britain Talks Climate, [The big picture: How people are relating to climate change in 2024](#)

Parish and Town Councils – Duty to Biodiversity

Parish and Town Councils: wide range of powers, even on climate, but few duties – **except biodiversity**

[Government guidance May 2023](#): Parish and Town Councils must:

- consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration.
- act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives.

Not obliged to publish a report, but Government guidance requires **all public authorities to complete first consideration of what action to take** for biodiversity by 1 Jan 2024. They must agree their

- policies and objectives as soon as possible after this and must reconsider the selected actions
- within five years of completing their previous consideration, or more frequently if they choose

Biodiversity - Massive Losses



Warwickshire Coventry & Solihull
Local Nature Partnership

- Has been massive loss of habitat over last 70 years
- UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth
- 97% loss of wildflower rich meadows since 1945
- UK species studied have declined on average by 19% since 1970.
- Nearly one in six species are threatened with extinction from Great Britain
- Predatory insects e.g. 2-spot Ladybird which help control crop pests, have declined by more than a third (34%).
- 54% of flowering plants and 59% of bryophytes (mosses and their relatives) has decreased in locations found

Ref: <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

Action Needed: Habitat Expansion



Warwickshire Coventry & Solihull
Local Nature Partnership

- ❖ Need to reach 30% of land in nature friendly management by 2030 to meet IUCN target.
- ❖ This land will still produce food.
- ❖ Current scale - ~ 13% if all stewardship agreements are fulfilled and Local Nature Reserves are in good condition
- ❖ To achieve 30%, we need to target enhancement of 40 – 50% of land
- ❖ Woodlands – double area covered from **7% to 15%**
- ❖ Grasslands – restore 663ha – increase to **2000 ha**
- ❖ Ponds – target **restore 400 ponds** by 2030;
create 400 new ponds by 2030

Action Needed: Retain Species



Warwickshire Coventry & Solihull
Local Nature Partnership

- ❖ Common but declining species needing widespread action
including house sparrow; starling; swift; bats; hedgehog; amphibians; pollinator insects/bees
- ❖ Rare species needing urgent action to retain
including waders: curlew, snipe; water vole; white-clawed crayfish; farmland birds; butterflies/moths; dormouse
- ❖ Recovering species needing protection or further measures
otter; bittern
- ❖ Seasonal/visiting species needing key/traditionally used sites
overwintering birds
- ❖ Re introductions/habitat creation for 'lost/missing' species
pine marten, beaver, lynx, osprey



Biodiversity Council and Community Action

How can your Town or Parish help restore nature?

Create a Local Nature Action Plan (LNAP)

- First developed by [South Gloucestershire Council](#) specifically for Town and Parish Councils
- Over half of Parish and Town Councils have adopted plans
- Bath & North East Somerset Council [adapted](#)
- WALC x Warwickshire Local Nature Partnership have now launched with a workshop for Councils and communities



Local Nature Action Plans:

guidance for town and parish councils



Biodiversity Council and Community Action

How can your Town or Parish help restore nature?

Create a Local Nature Action Plan (LNAP)

- ❖ Raise awareness through local media, events, networks
- ❖ Record wildlife, report sightings
- ❖ Survey hedgerows
- ❖ Support projects by volunteering, set up new local groups to take action
- ❖ Restore derelict ponds – village and farm ponds
- ❖ Do wildlife watches, Toad Action days, install bird boxes, feed birds through winter

Local Nature Action Plans:

guidance for town and parish councils

Parish and Town Councils - Climate and Nature Action

Best and current guidance publicly available from

Society for Local Council Clerks

<https://www.slcc.co.uk/climate-action/>

Carbon Literacy Training - Content

- “Carbon Literacy is about understanding what I actually need to do, where I can get help to do it, actually doing it and seeing that I’ve done it”
- One day’s worth of learning, emphasising the relevance of learning about climate change to the group’s context (workplace, community)
- Emphasis on the things that can be done rather than things that cannot

**Carbon Literacy
Project**



Carbon Literacy Training Action Plan

- Each learner is invited to complete a short assignment and action plan at the conclusion of the training. This is submitted to The Carbon Literacy Project for certification as “Carbon Literate”.
- Part 1: Explain in your own words what we need to do to reduce carbon emissions
- Part 2: Two actions, one individual, one group, with an estimate of the carbon reduction for each action

**Carbon Literacy
Project**



Climate and Nature Action for Smaller Councils

Climate and Nature Action is often described under three headings

- **Mitigation** – reducing the carbon emissions that contribute to global warming.
- **Adaptation** – responses to the climate changes that are already happening.
- **Nature Recovery** – including offsetting the impact from past development.

Climate and Nature Action for Smaller Councils

- What is the current consensus?
- Is the council in agreement to do something for the future of their community?
- Is there already a climate / nature recovery / sustainability champion?
- Are we more focused on traditional council activity and responsibilities²?
- Do we simply think there is not enough time to take on more tasks?
- But even the smallest council has to respond to planning applications...

Respond to Planning Applications



Does the proposed design aim to minimize energy requirements?



Does the application justify any use of carbon-intensive materials?



Is the use of reclaimed or recycled materials apparent in the application?



Does the application address standards for energy efficiency?



Are new homes to be fitted with a source of renewable energy?



Are sites allocated for new housing easily accessible by walking / cycling / public transport?

Respond to Planning Applications



Does the application avoid loss of local nature sites and green spaces?



Where the application includes a new open space, does it include sufficient new native tree coverage and other plant life?



Does the application support low-carbon vehicles, for example, with electric vehicle charging points easily accessible?



Does the application specify that LED lights are to be used?



Does the application propose building on a flood plain?



Does the application include where appropriate water saving measures such as using water butts, toilet flushers that save water and runoff water in concrete areas?

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) – What is it?

- From the Environment Act 2021, the principle is to enhance biodiversity
- BNG is intended to ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than after development
- All qualifying planning permission in England is required to deliver at least 10% BNG
- As a council you can:
 - Ask for local authority for a briefing
 - Ask your ALC for training

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Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) – Who is it for (England)?

- Generally, any planning application for a single dwelling or more (not extensions)
- Commercial development of more than 1,000 sq. m. or one hectare
- Minerals or waste related development
- Nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs): see [guidance developed for parish and town councils](#) by SALC

Government Guidance– What LA's should do

Developer's Application

- Confirm BNG applicable
- Calculation of the biodiversity value of the site (for measuring)
- Description of any irreplaceable habitat
- A habitat plan of the whole site

Local Councils to check:

- If not, why not?
- Have they missed anything?
- Is there really no alternative?
- Is it accurate?

Biodiversity Net Gain Plan – Government template is not mandatory

DEVELOPER'S APPLICATION, FOR LOCAL COUNCILS TO CHECK:

- To what extent the net gains are to be provided on-site and off-site
- A draft habitat management plan for on-site biodiversity
- Plan for any off-site biodiversity gain

Words of caution

- Some developers have (already) claimed there is no biodiversity on site!
- Proposals that private gardens are part of the solution may not be binding on those households
- There is an option to buy “biodiversity credits” - which may mean any improvements happen miles away – so get our own local proposals in early!
- BNG plans are only agreed AFTER planning permission has been given, and local councils are not asked to be involved in those discussions

What about your Council?

- Review the council's own property, landholding and operations to see if carbon emissions could be reduced.
- Consider how nature recovery might be supported on green spaces we control
- Grasscutting contract, suppliers, procurement
- Who are your local partners in the community: school, pub, shop, village hall, sports club, church and can you collaborate?

What about your Council?

- There are different stages for local councils in a climate action journey:
 - Just beginning
 - Already declared an emergency / agreed environmental policies
 - Already doing some climate action (even if not so labelled)
 - Targeting net zero
 - Co-operating with local residents around climate action

Engaging with residents

- Existing climate / biodiversity groups
- Stands at the annual parish meeting
- Community / walking workshops
- Household survey (gets a mailing list)
- Talks by specialist professionals
- Online maps to locate and post ideas
- Neighbourhood planning events
- Open house events
- Individual approach to businesses
- Publicise all the above

Sometimes all it takes is a single action

- Antrobus Community Kitchen Garden: anyone from the village can grow fresh food for themselves whilst part of a wider group
- Originally operated as a committee of the Parish Council, who seed funded the polytunnel
- It opened in 2011, and from Sep 2018 it became an independent village organisation
- Produce is on sale in the shop and open days are held annually.



Some possible actions – there are more

TRAVEL

- Installing electric vehicle charging points.
- Car sharing scheme
- Encouraging active travel
- Expanding the network of bicycle lanes and footpaths
- Supporting homeworking by providing wi-fi enabled spaces and warm spaces.

ENERGY

- Switching to a sustainable energy supplier
- Generating sustainable energy, either by building or a larger scheme
- Energy efficiency (e.g. insulation)

BIODIVERSITY

- Tree and shrub planting
- Rewilding/wildlife friendly planning (from verges to larger areas)
- Working with local landowners to manage land for wildlife.
- Cutting the use of pesticides

FOOD DISTRIBUTION / REDUCING WASTE

- Create new allotments / community orchard.
- 'Buy local' campaign.
- Local produce markets
- Community fridge

Environmental Planning Guidance

- Basic Principles
 - **Principal Activities**
 - Common Techniques
 - Choosing Materials and Products
 - Choosing Contractors
 - Legal Responsibilities and Powers
 - Further guidance and good practice
- A. Template for a climate action plan
 - B. Template for project appraisal
 - C. Local councils' powers and opportunities around climate change

[Available from SLCC](#)

Principal Activities

- Emergency plans
- Climate action plans
- Neighbourhood development plans (England)
- Wellbeing, biodiversity and place plans (Wales)
- Managing or developing the built environment
- Managing or creating sources of renewable energy
- Managing sites for biodiversity
- Managing council operations including transport

Managing Sites for Biodiversity

- No mowing in May (apart from actual playing areas), to allow wildflowers to support pollinating insects.
- Only one mowing a year where possible and consider rotational mowing in sections to avoid mowing an entire site at once (good for hibernating insects and ground nesting birds) - aim to mow in August / September after seeding.
- No artificial fertilisers that reduce the quality of grasslands
- Planting more trees and hedges
- Trialling alternatives to pesticides

What about other councils and local authorities?

- Neighbouring parishes can share projects and expenses – ask them
- Parish clusters can be effective, e.g. lengthsman scheme
- Wildlife corridors and rights of way provide early possible links
- Neighbourhood planning provides a natural link to planning authorities
- Do higher level authorities have a climate or net zero plan?
- Do they have supporting officers?
- Bulk buying of solar panels?
- Are any of your councillors also district or county councillors?
- Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 supports joint working

What about your MP?

- Have something to get their attention
- Invite them to a local event?
- Are they connected to any particular Government department or pressure group?
- Is there a local controversy or need you can contact them about?
- They may have links to funding
- Current bills include the [Wellbeing of Future Generations](#) for the UK
- Once made contact, keep in touch

Support for Local Councils

- NALC Climate Change webpage & Climate Emergency Network
- County associations
- Local networks
- CSE webinars and other training
- Other national bodies and networks
- Local Nature Action Plans guidance
- www.slcc.co.uk/climate-action

Climate and Nature Action for Smaller Councils

- Do you know what would motivate or mobilise your community?
- Can you find solutions with co-benefits?
- What are the barriers to action?



Photo © Hulme Community Garden

THE GREAT COLLABORATION

Working in partnership for people, place and planet



The Great Collaboration

- A web-based resource and human network
- Developed in Herefordshire, now being extended nationally
- Another community engagement opportunity when residents select climate actions
- Further advice for parish councils, now being extended
- Adding in more collective actions, forum discussion, and digital mapping
- Current pilot programme in East Anglia
- You can contact us via office@greatcollaboration.uk





CONTACT

Email: hello@greatcollaboration.uk to join weekly Zooms Wednesday at noon

Acknowledgements and links

1. www.slcc.co.uk/climate-action-for-smaller-councils
2. www.slcc.co.uk/commenting-on-local-planning-applications
3. www.slcc.co.uk/guide-to-biodiversity-net-gain
4. www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty
5. Sample [Climate Change Working Group](#)
6. Sample [Climate and Ecology Sub-Committee](#)
7. www.kendalclimatejury.org
8. www.facebook.com/AntrobusCommunityKitchenGarden
9. www.holmevalleyclimateaction.co.uk
10. www.slcc.co.uk/environmental-planning-guidance
11. www.slcc.co.uk/model-biodiversity-policy
12. www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/climate-change
13. www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/nalc-national-networks
14. [Local Nature Action Plans guidance for town and parish councils.pdf \(southglos.gov.uk\)](#)
15. [Local Nature Action Plan Field Guide \(southglos.gov.uk\)](#)