

Report of the Northants CALC Climate Conference Tuesday 22 November 2022

The Climate Conference 2022 took place on Zoom on 22 November 2022. It was the third Northants CALC event of 2022 focusing on climate change and sustainability.

Introduction

Northants CALC CEO welcomed everyone to the conference and started by outlining what Northants CALC is doing internally as an organisation, and what it is doing to support member councils. Northants CALC has resolved that it “... *will endeavour to achieve carbon neutrality from its own operations by 2030 and will develop a strategy to achieve this. Northants CALC commits to working with member councils in Northamptonshire to help them become carbon neutral by 2030. Northants CALC recognises the urgency for action to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and in doing so calls for the Government to provide further powers and resources to local authorities to enable the targets to be met.*”

Northants CALC has encouraged parish and town councils to take practical action by supporting and promoting **20 Actions on Climate Change** produced by Friends of the Earth: <https://www.northantscalc.com/uploads/20-actions-on-climate-change-v2.pdf>. It has created an **energy buying partnership** with Clear Utility Solutions (CUS), which places councils on green energy tariffs. The scheme has saved parish and town councils in Northamptonshire tens of thousands of pounds, and just as importantly, hundreds of thousands of kilograms of carbon. See <https://www.clearutilitysolutions.com/ncalc-partnership>. Northants CALC works with CCLA to encourage councils to make ethical and green investments (<https://www.northantscalc.com/uploads/ccla-a-climate-for-good-investmentoct21.pdf>) and will continue to work with CCLA both for our own investments and to promote parish and town council investments.

In October 2022 Northants CALC worked with **Electric Places** and North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) to promote Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) in North Northamptonshire. A set up meeting was held on 12 October 2022 that 34 parish and town councils attended, and an expression of interest request went out afterwards to find some pilot parishes. It is hoped that something similar can be done in West Northamptonshire.

Northants CALC has a very low carbon footprint. Moving out of its offices in Litchborough in 2020 saved a huge amount of cost and carbon in heating the premises in the winter and cooling it in the summer because it was a very energy inefficient building. It has also saved approximately 18,000 miles per year in staff commuting. The Association was a very early adopter of online meeting technology, the first Zoom meeting having been held in 2018, and has widely promoted online training. Board meetings are hybrid or fully remote. Having

reduced the carbon footprint as far as possible, it is now looking at options for offsetting the remaining, unavoidable, carbon footprint.

Ed Gemmell – Councillor and Leader of The Climate Party

Danny Moody then introduced the first guest speaker, Ed Gemmell, who is a parish councillor and chairman of the Climate Emergency Working Party at Hazlemere Parish Council and is on the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Climate Emergency Committee. He is also a Buckinghamshire Unitary Councillor sitting on the Transport Environment and Climate Change Committee and a member of the LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board. He works as Managing Director of Scientists Warning Europe and has just started a political party called The Climate Party.

Ed provided an update on the **key developments from COP27**, including the creation of a Loss and Damage Fund for countries impacted most by climate change and the reaffirmation of the commitment to keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees. However, he said these were minor and incremental gains and that overall COP27 had been largely disappointing. He read out excerpts from Alok Sharma's speech ([see full text](#)) citing the missed opportunities to make bigger steps forward.

In his talk Ed Gemmell balanced scientific warnings with a call to practical action. He urged parish and town councils to declare a climate emergency (if they had not already done so) and cited evidence from NALC that shows councils are more likely to act if they have made a declaration. He was able to run through a whole range of initiatives and practical actions that he has been involved with in his role as a parish and unitary councillor, as well as in his national roles for Scientists Warning Europe and the Climate Party. From "Bee Squared" (where residents are encouraged to plant 1m² of wildflowers in their front gardens to create wildlife corridors for pollinators) to car share clubs, repair cafés, and initiatives to encourage more walking and cycling and much more besides.

Neighbourhood Planning is a vital element of what parish and town councils can do to make a serious contribution to reducing carbon emissions. From stipulating that new-build houses should be environmentally passive, to encouraging the on-site reuse of building materials, to allocating space for green corridors, Ed's view is that a parish or town council can use **Neighbourhood Plan as a powerful tool for change**.

Ed concluded his presentation with a quote from Queen Elizabeth II, who said at COP26 *"It has sometimes been observed that what leaders do for their people today is government and politics. But what they do for the people of tomorrow: that is statesmanship."*

Megan Blyth - Centre for Sustainable Energy

The next speaker was **Megan Blyth from the Centre for Sustainable Energy**. A major part of her role has been supporting young people through the Bright Green Future and

Green Influencers programmes. Megan also works on projects supporting communities with their own energy projects, and local councils through the Parish Climate Action Day events. Megan has also worked alongside Research & Analysis evaluating energy advice projects and Household Energy Services offering energy advice.

Megan described what a “carbon footprint” is and the importance of measuring it accurately. She explained the features and benefits of the **IMPACT Tool** (<https://impact-tool.org.uk>) to calculate an organisation or a community’s carbon footprint. There are two measures: the Territorial footprint, which considers emissions arising within a given area, including emissions from industry, roads, and agriculture, and the Consumption footprint, which is based on individual property data, which can then be aggregated to give a community footprint. The two models can be used simultaneously and comparatively.

Meghan said that the IMPACT Tool gave an estimated figure for a community’s carbon footprint, and the results provide a useful starting point for generating discussion and debate and for identifying priorities. The tool provides a snapshot but can be run at the start and end of a community project to illustrate benefits.

A copy of Meghan’s slides is available at <https://www.northantscalc.com/uploads/ncalc-climate-conference-carbon-footprinting-cse.pdf?v=1669975116>.

Breakouts

After a short break, the delegates split into breakout rooms, one for North Northamptonshire and one for West Northamptonshire Council.

North Northamptonshire Council

Cllr Harriet Pentland from North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and Executive Member for Climate and Green Environment and chair of the Executive Advisory Panel on Climate Change Environment & Growth, outlined what NNC has done so far to respond to the climate crisis. NNC has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030 and has set aside an initial £1m for related initiatives. Many NNC officers and members have undertaken Climate Literacy training which has been well received by all. Climate Literacy training delves into the detail of what individuals can do to make a difference. It is planned to attend the train the trainer course and roll out further training within NNC.

NNC has already planted over 4,000 trees on council land with the help of communities and schools. Working with school children helps to get the message through at an early stage and often the children will take home information to share with their families. The Queen’s Green Canopy (QGC) helped raise awareness of the importance of planting trees. A tree management policy has been approved which states the council will replace a tree which has had to be felled. The council will seek expert advice to ensure the right tree is planted in

the right place and a Tree Strategy is in draft form which states where the trees can be planted across North Northamptonshire.

The NNC Pollinator Strategy has recently been approved and as part of that the “Pardon the weeds, we’re feeding the bees” initiative has been well received. The council is putting up signs which explain why patches are not being regularly maintained as part of the initiative. This policy also looks at the safe use of pesticides.

The council is looking at sustainable travel and increasing access to Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs). There is a section on the NNC website whereby people can request EVCPs to be installed in their area. NNC is working with communities to expand greenways and there have been a range of workshops regarding walking and cycling infrastructure. The council receives data regarding the use of Voi scooters and data shows they have saved over 1,000 journeys so far, whilst electric-powered Starship robots have been delivering groceries to those who cannot or do not want to venture out to the shops.

NNC is committed to retrofitting its housing stock. 202 houses have already been retrofitted with better insulation, new windows, and renewable energy heating. Planning policies are being reviewed.

A copy of Harriet’s slides is available at <https://www.northantscalc.com/uploads/ncalc-climate-conference-presentation-nnc.pdf?v=1669975004>.

West Northamptonshire Council

In the session for West Northamptonshire, Leader of West Northamptonshire Council, Cllr Jonathan Nunn, said that responding to the climate crisis was a “*key part of our DNA.*” He said that the council had signed up to the UK100 (<https://www.uk100.org>), “*a network of highly ambitious local government leaders, which seeks to devise and implement plans for the transition to clean energy that are ambitious, cost effective and take the public and business with them.*” and that it took its climate pledge very seriously. He said that WNC has a portal for individuals – and parish and town councils – to make climate commitments and urged delegates to visit it and to encourage residents to as well ([see link](#)).

WNC has committed to achieving Net Zero from its own emissions by 2030 and those of residents and businesses by 2045. It has 12,000 council-owned homes that will all need to be retrofitted to be made sustainable, and that will be a huge task.

Martin Wilson, Sustainability Manager at WNC, then explained what the council is doing to reduce its carbon footprint and to offset remaining carbon emissions. He explained some of the big challenges, such as managing four closed landfill sites that the council inherited which produce 4,000 tonnes of carbon emissions per year due to the legacy of how they were capped. The aim is to cut this by at least 50% by 2030.

Martin explained that the council's Net Zero targets run concurrently and that he was interested to work with any person or agency, including parish and town councils, to further accelerate the 2045 target. WNC is preparing a Sustainability Plan, which will be published soon.

West Northamptonshire Council has appointed two new project officers to its Sustainability Team, Felicity Parker and Eugene Tom, who will work alongside the Sustainability Officer, Joely Slinn and Sustainability Manager, Martin Wilson.

Felicity joined the meeting to explain some of WNC sustainability funding streams for low-income households, such as the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) ([link](#)), and the ECO 4 flex grant ([link](#)).

A copy of the slides used by WNC speakers is available at <https://www.northantscalc.com/uploads/ncalc-climate-conference-presentation-wnc.pdf?v=1669975030>.

Helen Ball - Shrewsbury Town Council

The final guest speaker was Helen Ball, Clerk to Shrewsbury Town Council (STC), which is recognised nationally as a beacon council on climate change and sustainability. STC passed a Climate Emergency resolution in 2019 and has been working very hard to reduce the climate impact of its own operations and those of its residents. Helen explained that the council's carbon footprint was equivalent to approximately 40 households, whereas there are over 35,000 households in the town, so the focus had been on influencing residents and spending resources on that, and the council had increased its precept by 20% to provide a rolling £250,000 per annum to spend on climate and sustainability initiatives. Helen described it as their “**spend to save – the planet**” approach.

Helen outlined all the initiatives STC had implemented, including purchasing all energy from 100% renewable sources, planting 25,000 trees, promoting walking and cycling (including councillors committing to cycling to meetings!), and the creation of a Climate Change Think Tank, working with the Carbon Literacy Project (<https://carbonliteracy.com>).

STC aims to be carbon negative, not just carbon neutral and engages positively with Shropshire Council (the unitary council) on a wide range of initiatives.

Helen ended her inspirational presentation with an inspirational quote from Anne Frank: “*How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.*”

A copy of Helen's slides is available at <https://www.northantscalc.com/uploads/ncalc-climate-conference-helen-ball-shrewsbury-town-council.pdf?v=1669975094>.

Danny Moody thanked the speakers, guests, and delegates, and said that there is a big challenge for everyone to meet the 2030 net zero targets, particularly in the context of austerity and the cost-of-living crisis, where people may be motivated to make decisions that save money now, rather than pay off environmentally in the future. He said that it was important that parish and town councils, the unitary councils, and other agencies use the right language to communicate about the climate crisis. The common thinking has been that scaring people with the facts will catalyse action, but after forty years of this, it's becoming clear that this is not the case – instead of action, it's leading to feelings of helplessness and apathy. He said, *“We need to communicate in a way that encourages action, not despair, and I hope that this conference has done that.”*

In closing, Danny Moody noted that *“...whenever parish and town councils come together there is an impressive mix of enthusiasts, evangelists, and experts.”* and that *“parish and town councils are a force for good. They are positioned to lead their communities and inspire local action.”*

Further Information

See www.northantscalc.com/climate for resources for parish and town councils wishing to make a difference on climate change and sustainability.