



Birchwood Town Council – Climate Emergency Action Plan

A climate emergency motion was presented to Birchwood Town Council and approved unanimously by Council in June 2019

1. The declaration means that we recognize and understand the seriousness of the situation as reported by the intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in October 2018
2. We pledged to make Birchwood Town Council carbon neutral by 2030, and to work extensively to help both residents and local businesses significantly reduce their carbon footprint, and to approve an agreed action plan to achieve these goals which will be completed within 6 months of the declaration (December 2019).
3. It was also agreed to call on Warrington Borough Council to declare a similar climate emergency motion which would then facilitate the achievement of our own goals. (this occurred and has since led to the formation of a Climate Emergency Commission)
4. We recognize that our role as a Town Council is one of public representation and leadership that needs to be applied to address the serious situation of climate change and wildlife extinctions on behalf of Birchwood. We will work cooperatively with other nearby parishes and any other organisations and councils where appropriate to determine and implement best practice methods to contribute to the limitation of Global Warming to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels
5. Priority will also be given to supporting biodiversity in recognition of the current major global extinction of wild animal and plant species and the urgent need to conserve, repair and enhance all natural habitats.



6. Birchwood Town Council will consult with residents, community organisations and businesses within the town in the elaboration of our plans and any future versions prior to approving or implementing any proposals or actions that may impact on them.

Introduction

The IPCC declaration in 2018 emphasised the seriousness of the situation with regard to climate change and established the goal of limiting the average global temperature increase to less than 1.5 degrees with respect to preindustrial conditions. To achieve this goal, there is a need to reach a zero carbon emissions situation within 10 years. Since 2018, a series of observations are suggesting that we may have even less time. Temperature increases in the arctic in 2019 have been astonishing, with the coast of Greenland experiencing temperatures as much as 9 degrees C above normal in some locations, This is rapidly accelerating melting of the icecaps and glaciers in the arctic region and leading to increasingly fast sea level rises.

To take this plan to the next stage, it is proposed that at least two planning meetings be held which would be open to the public. This will allow new ideas and proposals to be developed, many of which may require input from Warrington Borough Council. The following plan is divided into several sections. The first is a consideration of how Birchwood Town Council can become carbon neutral by 2030.

Section 1. Birchwood Town Council

Birchwood Town Council has an existing carbon footprint originating from several sources. It is recommended that a specific budget is allocated to facilitate the changes that will be necessary.



1.1 Buildings:

Our office will present some challenges as it is a listed building and there will be restrictions on what we can do. A full carbon audit of our buildings should be carried out, but the following actions seem likely:

1.1.1 Improve heating control by installation of a NEST or similar to replace the existing controls

1.1.2 Consider replacement of the existing gas boiler with a condensing boiler which would increase efficiency from the current 75-80% up to around 90% or alternatively, consider the installation of an air source heat pump.(see 1.1.7)

Change all the existing lighting from the current fluorescents to LED lighting. This would be expected to reduce electricity usage to around 40-50% of the current level.

1.1.3 Ensure that current loft insulation is as good as it can be and if not install further depth of insulation.

1.1.4 Get in some expertise to give advice on anything further that could be done to improve wall insulation. This might also include the possible treatment of the brickwork with 25 year water repellent silane-based paste to keep water out as dry brickwork conducts away less heat. There will be a need to check if this is suitable for listed buildings.

1.1.5. Change current gas/electricity supplier to a green tariff as soon as possible and this should have 100% renewable electricity and 100% offset gas. It is recognised that offset gas is not ideal, but represents an immediate gain. The goal should be to move away from gas altogether in the longer term.

1.1.6 Look at the possibility of working in conjunction with Birchwood Youth & Community Centre and the possible use of PV panels on their roof to generate electrical power that could be used by both premises. An initial appraisal suggests that there should be no problem installing about 7 KW but this could be the limit. BY&CC are working to drastically reduce their energy usage, so this will be beneficial.



1.1.7 Once all possible actions have been considered that can reduce energy usage, consider the options for moving to electricity-based heating – possible use of an air-source heat pump with the current wet central heating system.

1.1.8 Install water butts to collect rainwater which can be used for watering all the town council's planters.

1.2 Equipment and vans:

1.2.1 All vans should be replaced with electric vehicles when they reach the end of their serviceable life. Currently this would incur significant cost, but it is hoped that by the time the first vehicle needs to be replaced, there will be more second-hand vehicles available and the costs are expected to reduce. The higher capital cost is expected to be offset by much lower running costs with current diesel costs being reduced by about 80% when using electricity, and current servicing costs also being much reduced.

1.2.2 Where practical, equipment will be replaced with battery-powered equivalents. This will probably require the purchase of backup batteries to ensure that the job can be successfully completed. There will be a need to explore other councils' experiences.

1.2.3 If a solution can be found to placing PV panels on the roof of BY&CC, then it is proposed that vehicle charging points be installed there rather than at the town council. This would require an agreement of some sort to be in place between Birchwood Town Council and BY&CC.

1.3 Biodiversity:

1.3.1 Mowing of grass should be done in such a way as to make Birchwood a neat and tidy town, but also provide a good habitat for flowers and wildlife. This could be done by planting wild flowers at the roadside as far as possible on areas where there is no footpath, while continuing to mow zones beside a footpath. It is recognised that this would incur a cost, but it would reduce the need for mowing. Guidance should be sought on the best kind of planting from appropriate national organisations, as the wild flowers usually sown cannot be planted every year.



1.3.2 Support any proposals for an extension to the reinstatement of wetland in Pestfurlong Moss as this acts as an excellent carbon sink

1.3.3 Look into the prohibition of the use of glyphosates in Birchwood. This has been done by a number of councils successfully.

1.3.4 Consider if there are any opportunities for further tree planting within Birchwood

1.4 Planning consents:

Birchwood Town Council should give due consideration to the potential impact of any new build housing or industrial/business development on the environment, and should require any such construction to conform with highest standards of energy efficiency. There is a need to establish what these standards should be

1.5 Other:

1.5.1 As far as possible, town councillors should lead by example and it would be useful if examples could be publicized of what they have been able to do to reduce their own individual carbon footprints.

1.5.2 Birchwood Town Council should keep abreast of best practice which is being implemented across the country and meet with other nearby councils which have passed a climate emergency declaration, to exchange views. Most leading-edge councils are some distance away, but their actions and any innovations can be carefully watched through existing tools such as the Climate Emergency project pages on the Basecamp App which Cllr D Ellis has access to. Preston is a very good example, but not quite as relevant for a town like Birchwood. Totnes in Devon has been at the forefront for many years, being the first town in the UK to become a transition town and to ban the use of plastic bags, and some of their ideas have been incorporated into this plan.

We should be open to any new ideas that may help achieve our goals.



2. Community Communication, Information Sharing and involvement:

2.1 A Birchwood Climate Emergency Webpage should be established on the town council website to help keep our residents informed. This would have the Declaration of a Climate Emergency that was adopted by the Town Council, the minutes of our Climate Emergency committee meetings and a copy of this Action Plan and any updates as it evolves. We could also include a section with ideas and tips for helping achieve Birchwood's goals and interesting links with further information.

2.2 A Birchwood Climate Emergency FaceBook page could be a useful communication tool for reaching a wider audience and has been implemented successfully in a number of locations including Totnes.

2.3 Reach adults through their children. Encourage local primary schools to become members of the Eco-schools movement to improve their environmental awareness and get them involved in environmentally related projects which can make a difference and make them better more responsible citizens.

2.4 Put together a climate emergency presentation which would include background on the issue, and present some of the things that people can do to help. Use this to do presentations to the public in general, but also to local groups/organisations who could be used to help drive our efforts forward. This could include local church groups, scouts/guides, WI, etc.

2.5 Look into the possible implementation of a Climate Champions scheme similar to that which has been implemented in Totnes. Through this, Birchwood Citizens would be invited to put themselves forward as volunteers to become Champions for a crash course in halving their energy demand. They could be supported through mentors to attempt to half the energy demand of their household within three months by taking a number of practical actions. This would provide information and useful examples that could be used to encourage other residents to take similar actions. It has the additional benefit that households on low incomes could be taken out of fuel poverty as a result.



Section 3 - Business

Currently we have one councillor who is a director of the Birchwood Forum which presents an opportunity to get some messages across to local businesses and contacts already established with Patrizia can help us to promote a number of initiatives including:

3.1 Car share – Birchwood Park operates a car share scheme which is accessed through a website. The declaration of a climate emergency in Birchwood could help to inject more momentum into this initiative. We should meet with Birchwood Park to discuss a possible campaign.

3.2 Birchwood Park operates a first class restaurant – The Engine Rooms. This facility offers an excellent variety of food including vegetarian/vegan food. This could perhaps be more heavily promoted as an important contributor to reducing personal CO2 footprint and recipes could perhaps be available for users to take home and use at home.

3.3 Encourage those who live locally to cycle or walk to work. There is already a cycle scheme, but again, this could perhaps be energised by the climate emergency declaration.

As well as this, there are a number of other areas where we can work-

3.4 Ensure that any new business buildings which are built within Birchwood have points for charging electric cars and built to the highest possible standards with regard to heat loss.

3.5 Encourage the owners of Birchwood Mall to look for ways to reduce energy consumption (they are already working on this) and to consider new ways to heat all the premises other than the current high temperature hot water system.



Climate Emergency themes and proposals for action:

It is proposed that we have an Action Theme each quarter that we bring to meetings and share information and ideas for actions residents, groups and businesses can take. We would need to plan the themes a year ahead.

4.1. Food.

4.1.1 Birchwood Town Council should support local food production, this includes helping to provide spaces for local people to grow food. While there is no clear area to have allotments, there are many areas of green space across the town which could reasonably be used for growing fruit bushes, vegetables etc. A good starting point could include helping an Incredible Edible group to get off the ground. Not only would this help reduce the carbon footprint of food consumed in Birchwood, but it could also help those on a low budget. This can begin in the garden of BY&CC, but could expand to other locations which could be identified in conjunction with WBC and YOUR housing group. A possible early target could be those small plots of land that are owned by companies/organisations which have no direct interest locally and who we struggle to get to maintain them.

4.1.2 We should ask that adequate garden space and/or shared community space for growing food should be provided in all new housing developments.

4.1.3 We should find ways to support local producers of foods to be able to sell their produce locally – for example in a regular farmer's market

4.1.4 We must support biodiversity and wildlife needs to ensure local food can continue to be grown healthily and be pollinated (see section on Biodiversity)

4.2. Transport.

4.2.1 We should investigate the potential to declare a Low Emission Zone in Birchwood by lowering speed limits on the main arterial roads through Birchwood.



This has been done for example in Wrexham, where the main dual carriageway speed limit has been reduced to 50mph from 70 mph.

4.2.2 Seek more bike parking facilities in and around Birchwood and look into the possibility of having a bike scheme to help get more residents cycling, including lessons for those who have never learnt to ride.

4.2.3 The pathways and walkways of Birchwood should be studied in some detail to try to make the whole town as friendly as possible for BOTH walkers and cyclists with appropriate markings.

Install benches to assist walkers to take a short rest. Put up signs saying pedestrian friendly town. We have the ideal environment which we should make the most of.

4.2.4 Encourage any action that could help reduce the use of cars on the school run. This could include the organisation of cycle or walk to school groups led by parents, and could include restrictions on parking. Work through the schools themselves. If parents have to use a car, they should consider taking more than one child.

4.2.5 Work with WBC to find ways to improve public transport between Birchwood and Warrington town centre – perhaps through having some express buses.

4.3. Energy

4.3.1 Birchwood Town Council needs to press local housing associations to carry out an audit on their properties in the town and carry out improvements especially for aspects such as loft insulation. Current information suggests that insulation is poor.

4.3.2 Look into ways a community energy company (or other alternative funding) could be set up to encourage the installation of PV panels on public buildings such as schools. Encourage schools to get their children involved in looking at energy use in their buildings

4.3.3 Work with residents to help them reduce their energy usage

4.3.4 Show residents that green tariffs are often the cheapest and not expensive as many believe.



4.4 Waste

4.4.1 Declare Birchwood a Zero Waste Town

4.4.2 Declare a Voluntary Ban on Single use Plastics

4.2.3 Seek local projects that can reduce, reuse or recycle waste locally

4.2.4 Call on WBC to provide a carbon footprint audit of their waste recycling services and seek improvements.

4.2.5 Encourage the installation of water fountains to reduce the need for plastic bottles.

4.2.6 Write to ASDA to call for a plastic bottle reverse vending machine to be installed in their car park

4.2.7 Encourage the use by residents of the Repair Café at BY&CC.

4.5 Biodiversity

4.5.1 Look into the possible planting of fruit trees and other indigenous species in appropriate areas within Birchwood.

4.5.2 Carry out a survey and plant more trees wherever possible to support wildlife and mitigate CO2. It is recognised that Birchwood already has a large number of trees which are now reaching maturity after 40 years. This will limit the ability to plant further trees, but existing trees will need to be protected as far as possible. Where trees have to be removed due to poor health, they should be automatically replaced with new appropriate specimens. Where trees are removed for development purposes, they should be replaced with at least an equal number of trees somewhere within Birchwood.

4.5.3 Allow grass verges and hedges to be trimmed less and later in the year in appropriate places to support more wildflowers and insects.

4.5.4 Call on WBC to review its policies on protecting biodiversity and insist on full ecological surveys of all protected or endangered species for all planning applications that may or are likely to affect a wildlife corridor or known wildlife habitat.



4.5.5 Call on WBC to ban the use of glyphosate in all public spaces based on the experience of other local authorities which have already done this.

4.6. Economics

4.6.1 The Town Council should buy local, fair trade and recycled products whenever available.

4.6.2 Support local independent shops, businesses and enterprises including those that help people to reduce their waste and carbon footprint.

4.7. Water

Each litre of tap water uses 0.7kw of energy to produce. Make this information available and share ideas about reducing consumption. This help cut bills. Fit water butts to BTC buildings where possible and use the water for outside plants etc.

4.8. Measuring individual carbon footprint:

Provide a link from the proposed Facebook page to enable residents to easily determine their current carbon use by using an accepted carbon calculator. This will create a baseline to help people measure and monitor their own carbon reduction programmes and improve awareness of measures that can make a dramatic difference to carbon use.

4.9. Health and wellbeing measures;

4.9.1 Ensure we help people to recognize and experience the benefits of a low carbon lifestyle (more active, better diet with less meat and more fruit/vegetables etc.)

4.9.2 Help residents and organisations to work together to share ideas and resources to make the changes easier and more pleasurable.

4.9.3 Seek creative, colourful and fun ways to make the changes

4.9.4 Improve health as a result of reduced vehicle emissions (see transport section)



(Note: this is not a complete list of everything possible – it is just work and proposals in progress. It is hoped that more actions will be added as meetings take place involving the general public)

In the compilation of this plan, the plans of a number of UK councils were consulted to help provide ideas that could be workable locally as well as Friends of the Earth UK: 33 actions local authorities can do on climate change