

## **Georgeham Parish Council**

### **Climate Emergency Action Plan**

Report to the Council meeting on 18 November 2021

#### **Preamble**

It is apposite that this report is being prepared as the UN Climate Conference – COP26 – is taking place in Glasgow and the news is full of high sounding ambitions and commitments from world leaders. It is unfortunately true that such promises have been made in the past ever since the Kyoto protocol in 1997 that committed governments to reduce their climate emissions, since when greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise.

The recent extreme climate events including forest fires, flooding, and extreme temperatures have helped to dispel any remaining doubts about the seriousness of the climate crisis and hopefully Glasgow will prove to be the turning point in the battle to stop the rise in greenhouse gas concentrations that we all hope for.

COP 26 has focussed attention on national governments. But the climate crisis will only be addressed successfully if actions are taken at every level of society from national governments right down through all layers of regional and local governments to individual people and businesses.

When we staged our climate event in November 2019 in Croyde Village hall I told the audience that the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere stood at 410.5 ppm. The most recent data shows it standing at 413.3 ppm; so still increasing despite a year of significant economic standstill due to the pandemic. The pandemic, while limiting economic activity and climate emissions, has also put a halt to our climate emergency activity; after making an excellent start in engaging residents, there has been little or no progress for the past two years or so.

#### **Current activity**

Despite the pandemic some activity in pursuit of the climate goals has taken place. A facebook page under the title “Zero Croyde and Georgeham” was established in 2019 and has 160 followers to date and is used regularly to post relevant articles and event news. There is also a Zero Croyde and Georgeham newsletter which has around 60 subscribers. Four working groups were established following the public meeting in November 2019 but these have not been active during the pandemic.

Some positive steps have been taken by the council and landowners and farmers with significant tree planting around the parish and local milk and vegetables on sale direct from the farm. In discussions with the beach ranger at RUDA it is clear that they are already taking steps to improve biodiversity around the site and have ambitious plans for further enhancing habitats on their landholding in particular around the lakes. As the owner of much of the central valley in Croyde their actions will make a major contribution to the aims of the climate emergency plan. Other landowners are already embarking on significant habitat enhancement which the council can support and encourage.

#### **Role of the parish council**

The council declared a climate emergency in September 2019 with an ambition to be net-zero by 2030. Net-zero means that after all measures have been taken to reduce fossil fuel use, any remaining CO<sub>2</sub> emissions arising from the community either directly within the the parish OR through

activity by residents such as travel or buying goods and services, are balanced by the removal of carbon from the atmosphere.

However net-zero is not sufficient to get CO2 levels to reduce: it will only stop the level from rising. There will still be the need to remove more carbon from the atmosphere. Removal of carbon (sequestration) is best achieved by natural processes where CO2 is absorbed by plants through photosynthesis and oxygen is released. As a rural parish with a sparse population there is the potential to modify land use to significantly increase the amount of carbon sequestered in this way. Given that towns and cities have much less opportunity to do this it is vital that rural communities embrace this. As well as helping reach net-zero these changes will also make a major contribution to reversing the loss of biodiversity by establishing a network of diverse habitats around the parish. Any land use changes will impact on the farming community so it is important that farmers and landowners are fully engaged in discussions about rewilding and other land use changes.

The council can support the transition to a net-zero economy in the following ways:

### **Decision making**

Georgeham Parish Council sits at the bottom of the government hierarchy and, as a relatively small parish, at least in terms of population, has limited resources and therefore limited ability to make a direct impact on the climate crisis. Despite this it can ensure that it takes the climate crisis into account in all its decisions be they in response to planning applications or managing its assets.

### **Leadership and advocacy**

The council can be effective in prompting action in the community by individuals, businesses, and landowners. This can be achieved in many ways: by showing leadership and advocacy to obtain financial and other incentives; through the provision of financial support possibly through a small grants scheme focussed on climate friendly activities; by providing high quality advice in the areas of transport, energy, food, and biodiversity at public events and on social media.

It can also support the need for more renewable energy resources which can reduce and eventually eliminate the need to use fossil fuels in heating our homes and powering our vehicles.

### **Neighbourhood Plan**

After a huge amount of work the council is close to having an approved Neighbourhood Plan. This is a powerful collection of policies fundamentally addressing land use issues around the parish. The plan will enable the Parish Council to have much greater influence over the planning system as well as setting out a vision for the parish over the next 10 years in the areas of housing, the built environment, the natural environment and economic development. The plan has been drawn up over the past five years or so and is based on national policies which are rapidly changing in light of the climate and biodiversity emergency. The plan is a live document that will be updated on a regular basis to reflect changing priorities. An early review of the plan should be undertaken to better reflect the climate emergency.

### **The Climate Emergency Action Plan**

The most important action the council can now take is to establish a plan to set out the actions needed over the next ten years or so to meet the commitments in the climate emergency declaration. This plan should sit alongside, and be reviewed in close relationship with, the Neighbourhood Plan. The climate plan will develop into a schedule of measureable actions over the next ten years which will help deliver many of the policy ambitions of the

Neighbourhood Plan. This plan, like the Neighbourhood Plan, needs to be developed with the local residents and be examined through extensive consultation.

The actions needed will cover community engagement and education, whole house retrofit, transition to electric vehicles including EV charging provision, habitat restoration and re-wilding, localising food production, renewable energy, and alternative transport provision. An account will need to be taken of the impact of our visitors and influencing them and the owners of holiday premises.

The first step in creating the climate plan will be to establish baselines for the state of the parish today. These baselines should initially cover energy and transport use, land use and biodiversity, the status of the housing stock including energy efficiency and the need for on-road EV charge points, and the potential for small domestic solar PV as well as larger ground-based renewables.

Engaging residents, and particularly for us, visitors to the parish, is vital to the success of the plan. People need to both understand the underlying causes of climate change and recognise that the actions they take to decarbonise their lives and businesses are key in the transition to a net-zero future. The council should therefore establish a comprehensive public engagement programme offering regular information and advice to residents and visitors including local businesses and landowners/farmers.

The council should also re-establish the steering group and working groups to engage local residents in the work needed to progress the plan.

### **Kickstarting the plan**

Relying only on the input from councillors and volunteers will make it difficult to achieve the progress that the climate emergency requires. In order to accelerate the development of the plan and the associated surveys and public engagement I propose that the council applies for a grant under the National Lottery Community Fund – Together for the Planet. Details of the fund and the criteria are shown below with a link to the relevant website.

The grant is for a maximum of £10,000 and the deadline for applications is 18<sup>th</sup> November. The grant must be spent within 12 months of receipt. A decision on the grant should be made by the middle of February 2022.

I am currently exploring the costs of carrying out the surveys needed to establish the parish baseline.

As well as the surveys the grant could cover the costs of a programme manager who would coordinate the survey work, organise the public engagement programme and, by the end of the grant period, have helped to produce a climate action plan for the parish that has been well researched and with strong support from residents.

The chances of getting a grant are probably quite low and we will need to make progress with the plan, albeit at a slower rate, without it. There will be a need for some financial support from the council irrespective of any grants that may be forthcoming.

In advance of any decisions by the parish council I have made provisional bookings at Croyde Village Hall for the last Wednesday in January, February, and March to hold public meetings on a variety of topics.

### Recommendations to council:

1. Appoint 3 councillors to steer the project on behalf of the council.
2. Agree to promote the climate plan through the appropriate Facebook pages and the parish website and encourage residents to participate in the working groups
3. Approve the application for funding to the Together for our Planet fund.
4. Recognise the need for ongoing funding from the Parish Council to support the climate emergency work.

## 1 Together for Our Planet – National Lottery Community Fund.

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/together-for-our-planet>

We're offering from £1,000 to £10,000 of National Lottery funding to support communities across the UK to take action on climate change.

Projects should reflect what matters to your community and can be small in scale. They could cover an area like:

- food
- transport
- energy
- waste and consumption
- the natural environment.

You do **not** need to be an expert in any of these areas to apply. We're particularly interested to hear from people **starting** to think about taking action on climate change in their communities.

In November 2021, the UK will host the [26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties \(COP26\)](#) in Glasgow. The UK Government's [Together for Our Planet](#) initiative has been created to engage people with COP26 and inspire positive climate action. National Lottery funding will support this by helping communities to take action on climate change.

Building on interest and excitement for this international conference, we hope to nurture and develop local ideas through this funding, supporting a legacy of ongoing climate action projects in hundreds of communities across the UK.

Area -	UK-wide
Suitable for -	Voluntary or community organisations
Funding size -	£1,000 to £10,000
Total available -	£2.5 million
Application deadline -	5pm on 18 November 2021.