

Abingdon Green Forum

Report to the Annual Parish Meeting 2023:

Summary from January 2022 to March 2023

Abingdon Town Council declared a climate emergency in March 2019, in recognition of the crises of global warming and destruction of the natural environment.

The town council pledged to take urgent positive action as a local response to help meet the huge challenges posed. As Chair of the Environment & Amenities Committee, Cllr Gabby Barody proposed a series of green forums for 2022 and ongoing, each with a different environmental focus.

The purpose of the forums is to promote and initiate changes which will help towards carbon neutrality within the town, reduce waste, promote the general well-being of our residents, and improve its biodiversity.

The Forum Steering Group is a collaboration of town councillors and local voluntary groups which are active in trying to improve the town's environment. The group includes representatives from One Planet Abingdon/ Climate Emergency Centre (OPACEC) and Abingdon Carbon Cutters (ACC), plus others relevant to each particular forum. Information is shared on Social Media and on the Webpage - <https://oneplanetabingdon.org/green-forum/>

Every quarter there is a display in the OPACEC cafe relating to the current topic.

The Forum invites views and ideas from all Abingdon residents and has included these in feedback to the wider town council and the Neighbourhood Plan.

Each Forum runs for three months; as well as setting aims which can be achieved within the three months, the forums have identified goals for the groups doing ongoing work on each topic.

1. ACTIVE TRAVEL & SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

January-March 2022 co-ordinated by Abingdon Liveable streets

The purpose of this forum was to encourage residents of Abingdon to walk and cycle more and use their cars less, in order to improve health and reduce the carbon footprint of the town. We drew together representatives from local groups already active in this area, including Abingdon Liveable Streets (ALS), Sustrans and Abibike. We collected views from residents of Abingdon, through surveys and at market stalls on 29 January, & on 26 March when approximately 60 people attended.

Nadine Matough (Sustrans) prepared a big poster showing the results of her survey into attitudes about school streets, 20 minute neighbourhoods, car sharing, cycle hire, improved routes, and speed reduction. She created pie charts analysing the 132 responses.

We showcased the winning design of the schools competition to design a logo for a Hi-Viz backpack cover & waistcoat; also 6 runners-up designs. Visitors to the stall could have a

Hi-Viz for a suggested donation towards costs of £5 each. The purpose of the Hi-Viz logo is to draw attention to the environmental benefits of cycling and to encourage more people to cycle when possible.

ONGOING WORK GOING FORWARD

- A new walking and cycling map of Abingdon has been prepared by the TC, Sustrans and Abingdon Liveable Streets.
- Signage to be improved for walking and cycling routes.
- Abingdon Liveable Streets is working on including the voices of more wheelchair users and families in plans to improve accessibility and safe streets for all users.
- ALS and OPACEC continue to promote car sharing, and use of public transport and green delivery slots.
- Schools are encouraged to engage Bikeability, and adult Bikeability scheme to be promoted.

2. BIODIVERSITY

April- June 2022 Co-ordinated by Lucille Savin, Carbon Cutter

Biodiversity solutions help to fight climate change; climate change and biodiversity loss are interconnected crises. The climate crisis is also linked to social issues. The aim of the biodiversity green forum was to inspire communities to connect with their green space. Activities included:

Plant swap under County Hall Museum.

This was a free event to introduce the public to new plant species they can grow at home. Advice was given about preferred growing conditions and propagation techniques

Promotion of No Mow May at CEC.

Sign boards were in the CEC plus a question-and-answer session was offered to the public.

Guided botanical tour of Albert Park.

The public were invited to a show of lichen, trees and wildflowers, all cleverly described by John Killick.

The UK Forestry Practice Guide; adapting forest and woodland management to the changing climate.

We do not know what weather climate change will bring, high temperatures, flooding, or the nightmare of forester's high wind. ACC offer help to other Abingdon groups and businesses, in tree selection, procurement and planting advice.

Platinum Jubilee Event.

Children were invited to guided entomology walks with Professor George McGavin (TV presenter and Oxford academic). And to draw or colour in woodland creatures to stick to large drawings of trees, connected-up underground with mycorrhizal fungi.

Anyone could make a solitary bee nest box to take home. The 10 minutes this took gave the chance to engage about different types of bees and how they cap off their egg chambers; bees' life cycle and what will attract bees to people gardens. They were asked to observe the micro habitat in their gardens.

ONGOING WORK GOING FORWARD

We continue to engage with the public through interpretation boards, eg of the wildflower meadow. Also bee beds, plant swaps, and through tree planting events, the next on 18th March 2023.

We are grateful for the exploratory work all local councils are putting into making wildflower areas possible within the town. We have offered our assistance with the area beside Northcourt Walk, and Boxhill Park.

3. REDUCING PLASTIC WASTE AND POLLUTION

July-September 2022 co-ordinated by Anne Smart

Abingdon Cuts Plastic is a subgroup of ACC. We encourage people, schools and businesses to refill and repair, to refuse and reduce their purchase of new single-use plastic, and where this proves challenging, re-use many times, and finally recycle.

At least 50 people visited our market stall on 16 July, taking the opportunity to read about our aims and progress, and to share their own views and ideas. A popular activity at the stall was making beeswax wraps to use instead of cling film. We also had an open suitcase: children were invited to draw pictures of things to take on holiday, avoiding single use plastic, eg shampoo bars and refillable water bottles. We gave out copies of a quiz asking people to find local plastic-free initiatives.

On 24th September we had a river and riverbank clean-up, together with AbiBinit, Kingfisher canoe club and Abingdon Rotary. This was part of Surfers Against Sewage Million Mile Clean, and also part of Thames Plastic Blitz. We send statistics of how much waste we have recovered, and which brands are the most prolific, eg Coca Cola.

At our stall on 1 October, during Great Big Green week, we gave out Zero-waste coffee to those who brought their own reusable cups, and also had some available to give out for a donation.

For more information on reducing plastic waste, see the Abingdon Cuts Plastic page on the Carbon Cutters' website.

ONGOING WORK

Ongoing work includes working with the town council on their initiative to reduce single use plastic in the town, starting with the Market Place, and devising a new pledge for businesses. We continue to organise river and river bank clean ups twice a year, the next being on 29 April 2023.

We have a power point presentation to show school assemblies and community groups, on "Plastic pollution and what we can do about it."

4. HOME ENERGY

October -December 2022 co-ordinated by Daniel Scharf of OPACEC

Our headline is: REDUCE ENERGY BILLS, KEEP WARM, & REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS!

We held four market stalls on 24 September, 1 October and 12 November; eg on 12 November, six volunteers helped, including Cllr Gabby Barody, and an estimated 30 people came to the stall for a conversation.

At the stall we had a model of a 1930s semi-detached house, made by Jason Oliver. We annotated the house to show where energy-saving measures can be taken, large and small. We cannot give specific advice on a property but we share information and have a leaflet with low cost tips on one side and websites to seek further information and assistance on the other side.

A major purpose of the forum is to gather views from Abingdon residents and share these with the town council. At our stalls, people were invited to tick which measures they have done, which they are considering and which have too many barriers. We asked people to elaborate on the barriers, eg cost and disruption: these are useful to know when considering all the retrofitting work that ideally needs doing to houses and flats in the town. The main finding, confirmed on each stall and our on-line survey is that there are very many barriers to progress, that require an equivalent number of different attempted solutions.

Daniel has had some discussion with local estate agents and housing associations regarding how energy efficiency measures and EPC rating could impact on the saleability houses.

In December we engaged a student from Oxford University micro-internship to investigate heat pumps, including any practical difficulties of installation; she produced a useful leaflet of which the town council is funding some printed copies.

ONGOING WORK

Ros Woodhead is employed by Oxford Low Carbon Hub, and is a valued member of our group as an energy adviser. We have a programme of different places to hold our advice stall: so far these have included the Monday market, library, 35 Ock St., Christchurch food bank, and the repair cafe. We discuss measures people have taken and are interested in taking; we give out information leaflets and samples eg low energy lightbulbs and simple room thermometers.

5. SUSTAINABLE FOOD

January-March 2023, co-ordinated by Gina Davis, OPACEC

Changing your diet to a more plant-based one is definitely one of the best and most effective changes you can make for our wonderful planet. The Changing Plates initiative has the aim of showing people what good vegan food could be like. Taster plate sessions were held on Saturdays throughout January.

In addition two local food vendors had Street Food stalls throughout January: Planted Plates provide healthy, hearty and homemade vegan food for the soul. Damascus Rose Kitchen provides Middle Eastern dishes cooked with love by refugee women.

During the Forum, speakers have presented talks, eg “Your diet and how it affects the Environment”, and there was a viewing of the brilliant film ‘Eating our way to Extinction’, followed by a light vegan lunch and discussion.

Two volunteers have started doing a monthly Salad and Chat session in the CEC cafe, on the first Friday of the month and our fantastic team of home bakers provide vegan cakes for the whole month.

On Saturday 25 March we will have a market stall with more taster plates and information, as a finale to this quarter’s forum.

We invite people to let us know their thoughts through an online feedback survey on the webpage <https://oneplanetabingdon.org/green-forum/>

ONGOING WORK

Monthly salad lunches will continue in the CEC, and we will have more Sustainable Food events in future.

It really is amazing what positive effect a small change in your diet can have on CO2 emissions. We need to make a change.

FUTHER TOPICS THIS YEAR

ENERGY & BUSINESS April-June 23, including an Eco-Fair on 13th May

SUSTAINABLE WATER July-Sept 23

HOW OUR LIFESTYLES AFFECT POORER COUNTRIES Oct-Dec 23

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE FORUMS, and where more work needed

1. Sharing of information and co-operation between the town council, groups and individuals active in each environmental area: this has worked well.
2. Sharing this information and raising awareness with members of the public, through a variety of ways, including social media and articles in the Abingdon Herald: we are exploring ways in which communication can be improved.
3. Comments and suggestions gathered from members of the public: we have gathered some responses on market stalls and online surveys: we would like to engage more local residents.

Anne Smart, Carbon Cutter and co-opted member of the Environment and Amenities Committee
25 February 2023