



Proposals for Sustainable Initiatives by North Hertfordshire District Council



A report by Transition Town Letchworth
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Introduction

Transition Town Letchworth (TTL) is a local charity whose members share an interest in building a more sustainable society. It is the local expression of the worldwide Transition Network, whose aim is to promote the transition from fossil fuel dependency to local resilience in the face of climate change; moving to a low carbon and therefore energy efficient economy.

In mid-2019, North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) set up a Cabinet Panel for the Environment in response to rising public concern over climate change and to follow up the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency. The Panel's role is to consider a range of views on issues relating to the environment and climate change (both for mitigation of and adaptation to) in order to advise the NHDC Cabinet. The Panel's remit includes:

- engaging with relevant external bodies (public, research and industrial);
- engaging with individuals and the community;
- advising on an appropriate response to relevant government or agency consultations;
- contributing towards Climate Change Strategy reviews.

TTL has contributed to each of the Panel's themed meetings and presented proposals on each topic that the Panel addressed. Since March 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak has interrupted proceedings and caused the Panel to move to 'virtual' meetings online. It has become evident to TTL that a number of ideas submitted to Panel sessions, particularly ideas that were only provided in written submissions, have yet to be fully considered by the Panel. With the initial set of panel meetings now completed it would seem an opportune time to revisit the submissions presented to the Panel at these meetings and ensure that each idea presented has been given due consideration and where appropriate, actions added to the Cabinet's Action Plan.

TTL's proposals for actions by NHDC

The four tables that follow compare ideas for action that TTL has proposed to the Cabinet Panel with any similarly themed Action Plan entries by the Panel.

TTL recognise that ultimately the actions the Cabinet decide to take forward will be prioritised, based on available funding and net savings of carbon emissions or material resources (taking into account the full life-cycle carbon associated with each proposal compared to its alternative).

The column titled 'NHDC excerpts' below links our proposals to date to supportive parts of the Council Plan 2020-2025 (CP, via Appendix A) and of the Climate Change Strategy 2020-2025 (CCS, via Appendix B). There is specific support by those documents for some of the proposed actions whereas for other actions the support is general.

Biodiversity, Food and Water

Ref	TTL's proposals for actions by NHDC	NHDC excerpts	Cabinet Panel for the Environment - action
1	<p>Develop and implement a strategy for managing the Council's estate so that it encourages wildlife and biodiversity. The strategy should cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planting schemes that support wildlife, Eliminating pesticides, Interventions, including partnering with community groups, to tackle litter pollution. 	CP-O, CP-P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate a less formal approach to litter picking (survey users to make sure this service is accessible and working well; issues with depositing at the tip (HWRC)) County Council to increase signage for being more litter aware. Investigate the option of litter picking stations (include schools)
2	Produce a strategy to increase NHDC allotment uptake, releasing extra land for allotments if demand exceeds supply.	CP-P CCS-K	
3	Become actively involved in community food growing, with a first step of identifying publicly owned spaces that can be used for this purpose.	CP-J	
4	<p>Review council practices and regulatory activities to minimise water use, reduce flood risk and allow local aquifers to be replenished by precipitation. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check that toilets and taps in council premises are low water flow / flush. Implement and encourage water permeable solutions for paths, cycle ways and driveways, adjusting NHDC Planning Requirements to discourage unnecessary hardstanding. Review Environmental Health guidelines with the aim of achieving the required Health Standards whilst minimising water usage. 	CCS-G CCS-K	

Buildings

Ref	TTL's proposals for actions by NHDC	NHDC excerpts	Cabinet Panel for the Environment - action
5	<p>Ensure that the most ambitious emissions targets possible are introduced swiftly through appropriate local planning policies to ensure:</p> <p>a) that all new homes are required to meet the maximum energy efficiency standards allowed under the National Planning Policy Framework;</p> <p>b) that new homes built on council owned land are demonstrably Zero Carbon Homes and can maximise their electricity generating potential.</p>	<p>CCS-B CCS-H CCS-K</p>	
6	<p>Reduce the amount of housing in the submitted draft Local Plan to not exceed the revised (2018 ONS based) housing need numbers, which could mean over 7000 fewer homes built by 2031. The reductions should be aimed at the least sustainable sites. Going forward NHDC should develop a more sustainable plan for the future by further exploring options for a new town rather than expanding existing towns.</p>	<p>CP-K CP-L</p>	<p>That the Service Director - Regulatory be requested to explore whether there is an opportunity to identify, in the Local Plan, which sites were most sustainable and whether these could be developed first.</p> <p>That the Service Director – Regulatory provides an update with regard to empty dwellings within in the district and how, where appropriate, these can be brought back into use as homes.</p>
7	<p>Address outdated national guidance on retail development with some innovative thinking.</p>	<p>CP-K</p>	
8	<p>Support home owners to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. This could be achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing or 'signposting' to technical guidance for householders on installing renewable technologies, maximising the energy saving benefits from any planned building work and fixing draughts. • Providing an optional inspection service for checking installation of insulation and building air tightness. • Setting up a builder rating scheme' which evaluates local builders on their understanding and quality of installation of building elements that deliver energy efficiency. • Challenging Heritage Foundation design principles which unnecessarily prevent improvements to energy efficiency in Letchworth. 	<p>CCS-B</p>	

Materials

Ref	TTL's proposals for actions by NHDC	NHDC excerpts	Cabinet Panel for the Environment - action
9	Produce and deliver a waste strategy which includes a plan to incentivise residents to reduce all types of waste, e.g. by: moving to a 3-week, then to a 4-week collection cycle for general and recyclables bins; offering residents a discount if they move to a 4 week service.	CP-G CP-H CP-I CP-J CCS-H CCS-M CCS-N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the service change of 4 weekly collections/smaller bins/ incentivise better recycling habits
10	<p>Increase repair and recycling options by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing the council provided waste service to organisations, businesses and schools to support the maximum level of recycling Ensuring waste from public bins are recycled by either providing segregated bins or ensuring waste goes for sorting. Providing local charities with town centre locations (which can be secured at night) where they can collect materials with a value so as to raise funds for their cause (e.g. Terracycle.) Holding regular educational campaigns. Encouraging into the district businesses which repair and/or recycle. 	CCS-H CCS-M CCS-N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the possibility of recycling points in the district Investigate the process to access an empty shop for Terracycle and other voluntary organisations. Highlight existing 'repair and re-purpose' campaigns and promote new initiatives Re-advertise real nappy campaign/exchange Monthly educational campaigns Investigate the renewal of a Furniture Reuse facility
11	<p>Promote a switch to re-usable take-away food containers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver a campaign to encourage all establishments that offer take-aways to accept and encourage (through a discount scheme) customers to bring their own take-away containers. Set up scheme to loan re-usable cups for events held in North Hertfordshire. Work with local BIDs to facilitate the introduction of a North Herts Cup Scheme, like the scheme introduced in Shrewsbury (http://www.shrewsburycup.co.uk). 	CP-G CP-J	Encourage the use of recyclable cups at district events.
12	Set up community compost sites on housing estates where gardens are small; and provide composting workshops.	CP-J CP-P CCS-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the possibility of Community composting. Investigate 'Rocket' composting sites Establish Community composting workshops

Transport

Ref	TTL's proposals for actions by NHDC	NHDC excerpts	Cabinet Panel for the Environment - action
13	Work in partnership with local people to agree a vision for a cycling and walking network that can be implemented in stages.	CP-B CP-D	
14	Trial Sustrans's innovative, modular road planning kit around school entrances and on school routes to explore whether different road layouts could encourage more children to switch to sustainable travel modes.	CP-B CP-C	
15	Deliver improved public transport routes and connections by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing 'Taxi-Share' services. • Developing transport plans which relocate bus stops into station forecourts and open additional entrances into stations to support more direct walking and cycling routes. 	CCS-L	
16	Install electric vehicle charging points across the town, supplied by renewable energy, to support those that need <i>[to use]</i> a car to switch to an electric car.	CP-F	
17	Develop and implement a strategy to reduce car ownership and use: <i>[edited]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing 'all day' on-street parking options on roads where there are adequate driveways and garages. • Ensure planning policies in all North Herts Towns and Villages allow off-street parking for residents of terraced housing with adequate frontage for a 'green' driveway. (This will allow residents to 'home charge' an electric car.) • Introduce inset parking bays which are only for residents / delivery vehicle use and place parking restrictions on major routes into towns (which should have the additional benefit of improving air quality if congestion is removed). • Facilitate the introduction of car clubs so as to reduce car ownership levels, especially for town centre properties. 	CP-B CP-F	

Conclusion

In this report we have gathered for review the range of proposals that we have made to NHDCs Cabinet Panel for the Environment, for actions by the Council. During the recent COVID-19 crisis we have seen evidence of people's willingness to come together and change their behaviours for the good of all. We have observed how our individual changes collectively have combined to reduce our local and nation carbon footprint, conserve materials and improve air quality. We now need to build on this experience and ensure that we maximise any opportunities that exist for reducing our carbon footprint.

Many of the ideas that TTL has proposed to the Cabinet Panel for the Environment are small scale, local (but aligned with national priorities), practical and needing minimal investments. They reflect the shift in community desires towards healthy, active living and long-term sustainability. TTL look forward to the Panel giving their due consideration to the ideas which have not yet been discussed.

APPENDIX A. Excerpts from NHDC's Council Plan 2020-2025

The items are not in any order of priority.

Please refer to the original wording and context within the source document, the Council Plan 2020-2025 ('CP', undated ca. 2nd December 2019). ([link](#))

The Council Plan ('CP') cites some earlier commitments by the Council.

For convenience, these are treated here as integral parts of the Plan.

- A. Carbon 'footprint': Identify the Council's current carbon 'footprint'. Also identify the district's overall carbon foot print ... (page 10)
- B. Climate change targets: Support in every possible way the achievement of the climate change targets, particularly carbon reduction targets. This includes above all designing new developments to discourage car use and to encourage alternatives such as walking, cycling and using public transport. (page 12)
- C. Air quality: Review our current approach to air pollution. (page 11)
- D. Transport: Work with cycling groups to produce a Cycling Plan... (page 10)
- E. Consider Ultra Low Emission Vehicles for all future operational vehicles. (page 10)
- F. Expanding the electric vehicle charging infrastructure across the district; installing additional electric vehicle charging points in council car parks ...; installation of on-street electric vehicle charging points in on-street parking bays in town centres (in agreement with the County Council). (pages 14)
- G. Materials: Increase recycling tonnages – target 60% for 2019/2020. (page 10)
Comment by HertsWOW: increasing tonnage is not a desirable aim; instead prioritise reduction of tonnage over increasing the recycled percentage of overall waste arising.)
- H. Carry out waste composition analysis. (page 10)
- I. Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) events; 2-3 events per year. (page 11)
- J. Greater utilisation of Herts Waste Partnership (HWP). (page 11)
- K. Building: We will look at existing infrastructure to make it more ecologically friendly. (page 12)
- L. Identify opportunities for requiring thermal performance better than the building regulations from new buildings in the district, including the potential for zero carbon houses. (page 12)
- M. Ensure new developments be designed to integrate them into existing communities, in particular ensuring that their infrastructure is appropriate. (page 12)
- N. Developments must provide a full range of housing, private, self-build, and social rented, for families and single people, for young and old. (page 12)
- O. Biodiversity & green spaces: Increase Biodiversity in the district. (page 15)
- P. The continued upkeep of district green spaces ... to maintain the biodiversity within the area. (page 15)

APPENDIX B. Excerpts from NHDC's Climate Change Strategy 2020-2025

The items are not in any order of priority.

Please refer to the original wording and context within the source document: Climate Change Strategy 2020-2025 ('CCS', undated ca. 30th January 2020). ([link](#))

The source references shown as 'web page' refer to commitments listed on the Climate Change page on the Council's web site as retrieved on 3rd August 2020.

- A. Representation: Represent the Climate Change interests of North Hertfordshire residents on county and regional plans, policies and aspirations; (*web page*)
- B. Initiatives: Support initiatives that increase the energy efficiency of residents' homes, reduce resource waste, and increase our sustainability for the longer term; (*web page*)
- C. Heritage: Protect our physical heritage; (*web page*)
- D. Challenges: Find environmentally sustainable solutions to the challenges; (*web page*)
- E. Causes: Minimise the causes of climate change within North Herts, where possible. (*page 3*)
- F. Operations: Key areas of focus on the District Council; (*page 4*)
 - 1. Reducing emissions from the District Council's estate and operations
 - 2. Improving use of sustainable transport in our operations
 - 3. Reducing our consumption of resources, increasing recycling and reducing waste;
- G. Weather: Respond to downpours and more frequent and intense flooding; (*page 3*)
- H. Reductions: Reduce our waste, reduce our CO2 emissions and improve energy efficiency; thus continuing the work over the last 13 years (*page 3*)
- I. Targets: Make North Hertfordshire Carbon Zero by 2030 [*ahead of*] current government targets and international agreements; (*page 3*)
- J. Carbon 'footprint': The Council has based its carbon footprint on buildings and will conduct a gap analysis; (*page 3*)
- K. Adaptation: The Council will continue to provide leadership and support for residents and businesses to adapt to the impacts of planning projects and switch to renewable energy sources to bring behaviour change in the community; (*page 4*)
- L. Transport: Encourage the use of alternative models of sustainable transport to reduce car travel and congestion; (*page 4*)
- M. Waste Hierarchy: Continue to promote the waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse and recycle waste through our policies and campaigns.; (*page 4*)
- N. Encourage residents, businesses and Council staff to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle plastics; (*page 3*)
- O. Partnering: Partner with local statutory, voluntary, community and private sector organisations in North Hertfordshire to ensure that we mitigate for and adapt to the Climate Emergency; (*page 4*)
- P. Reviewing: Measure and monitor the impact annually; a full evaluation will be undertaken in 2025. (*page 5*)

APPENDIX C. Excerpts from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The following are brief quotations from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), revised, February 2019. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

We have selected these excerpts as being highly relevant to safe cycling and walking. For their contexts and interpretation, see the revised NPPF document and MHCLG's guidance on topics in the revised NPPF,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>.

Guidance documents most relevant to the present proposals include:

- Healthy and Safe Communities, updated 1st November 2019
- National Design Guide, 1st October 2019
- Open Space, Sports and Recreation Facilities, Public Rights of Way and Local Green Space, 6th March 2014
- Travel Plans, Transport Assessments and Statements, 6th March 2014

Chapter 8 on page 27, Promoting healthy and safe communities

Paragraph 91. Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;
- b) are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and
- c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

...

Chapter 9 on page 30, Promoting sustainable transport

102. Transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals, so that:

- a) the potential impacts of development on transport networks can be addressed;
- b) opportunities from existing or proposed transport infrastructure, and changing transport technology and usage, are realised – for example in relation to the scale, location or density of development that can be accommodated;

- c) opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued;
- d) the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure can be identified, assessed and taken into account – including appropriate opportunities for avoiding and mitigating any adverse effects, and for net environmental gains; and
- e) patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes, and contribute to making high quality places.

...

104. Planning policies should:

...

- d) provide for high quality walking and cycling networks and supporting facilities such as cycle parking (drawing on Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans);

...

Annex 2, Glossary (pages 69 & 72)

National trails: Long distance routes for walking, cycling and horse riding.

Sustainable transport modes: Any efficient, safe and accessible means of transport with overall low impact on the environment, including walking and cycling, low and ultra low emission vehicles, car sharing and public transport.

Transport assessment: A comprehensive and systematic process that sets out transport issues relating to a proposed development. It identifies measures required to improve accessibility and safety for all modes of travel, particularly for alternatives to the car such as walking, cycling and public transport, and measures that will be needed deal with the anticipated transport impacts of the development.

APPENDIX D. Reports by TTL and associated community groups

You are welcome to contact us for copies of earlier reports and compilations, even though some may be due for updating. These are mainly available via our web site: <http://transitionletchworth.org>, apart from our submissions to the Local Plan process which are in the Planning Inspectorate's online archive.

Letchworth Active School Neighbourhoods, by Sustrans, November 2018 ([link](#))

Plastic Free Letchworth Updates and Resources, October 2018 ([link](#))

Ensuring Letchworth has a Resilient and Thriving Town Centre, December 2017 ([link](#))

Sustainable New Neighbourhoods for Letchworth Garden City, June 2015 ([link](#))

Submissions for the Examination of the Local Plan 2011-2031, 2013 to date ([link](#))
(some jointly with Letchworth Sustainability Forum and/or Herts WithOut Waste)

TTL's Presentations to North Herts. Environment Cabinet Panel ([link](#))

TTL's response to NHDC's Declaration of a 'Climate Emergency', July 2019 ([link](#))

TTL's Response to the Hertfordshire Rail Strategy Revision (2019), March 2020 ([link](#))

The Community Plan for a Letchworth Cycling and Walking Network v8, February 2021
(with separate volumes for proposed schemes and an online map of proposed routes) ([link](#))

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