

6<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Dear Councillor Stears-Hanscomb,

We are a new grass roots organisation, calling ourselves the **North Herts Climate Action Group**, formed from an alliance of local people who are members of different political parties and various environmental groups.

We have come together to seek action from our local council and community, to do everything possible to reduce the impact of catastrophic climate change on the people of North Hertfordshire.

We applaud the Council and its new leadership for adopting a resolution at its annual meeting to declare a **climate emergency**. The Oxford English Dictionary defines emergency as "*a serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action*". We hope that the Council will therefore follow this up with that very necessary immediate action.

We therefore ask the Council to commit to being carbon neutral by 2030 by adopting a radical climate emergency plan to:

- Reduce emissions from the NHDC estate and operations
- Reduce energy consumption and emissions by promoting energy efficiency measures, sustainable construction, renewable energy sources and behavioural change
- Reduce emissions from transport by promoting sustainable transport, reducing car travel and encouraging behavioural change
- Reduce consumption of non-renewable natural resources, increasing recycling and reducing waste particularly non-recyclable waste going to landfill
- Make the planning system in the District truly sustainable starting with the withdrawal of the current local plan review.
- To do all this the Council needs to undertake a carbon and energy audit to set a benchmark and challenging targets.

We would strongly suggest that NHDC should then take steps to

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develop a **Climate Crisis Action & Mitigation Plan** and that the local community, including CAG, be fully involved in that process. This should include young people below voting age-this is their future after all.

There are many issues to be addressed and numerous competing priorities. We appreciate that this will be an expensive and perhaps painful process with difficult decisions to be made. We appreciate that the process is made all the more difficult by cuts to local authority funding. Nonetheless, failure to take action will destroy our environment and threaten the livelihoods and indeed the very lives of generations to come. It is a time for courageous leadership.

It was quite clearly illustrated in Sir Christopher Stern's report, published in 2006, into the financial implications of climate change, that taking little or no action will cost around 20 times more than taking appropriate action early enough to mitigate climate collapse.

To begin with, North Herts CAG would ask the Council to consider taking priority action in the following areas:

## **1. Planning**

We are nearly at the end of our Local Plan review period. We believe that the current iteration of the plan does not satisfy the Council's legal duty to mitigate climate change or provide for adaptation, under section 182 of the 2008 Planning Act. The current draft also offers no real vision for a future affected by climate change. Therefore, the Inspector should be informed that the plan will be withdrawn and the process reviewed. This is a plan produced by the previous administration, it does not address the climate crisis and it is simply not good enough.

We would also ask the council to raise housing standards to "Passivhaus" standards, or similar, wherever possible.

We would also urge you, in granting planning permissions to require solar panels on flat or south facing roofs, following an appropriate viability survey, and adopt other policies which set higher energy performance standards than those currently required in the Building Regulations, for example the Passivhaus standard or the "code for sustainable homes" standard

The Council must encourage, fund and support neighbourhood plans across the District to impose higher environmental standards.

The Council must also focus more on demanding, monitoring and

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recovering section 106 monies from developers for environmental projects.

## **2. Pollution**

The CAG and many people in the community are greatly concerned about air pollution within the district. Strong actions need to be taken now to meet and exceed national air quality objectives. These include fighting the expansion of Luton Airport, action to tackle vehicle engine idling (especially outside schools, railway stations, town centres and so on).

Additional AQMA's (monitoring points) should be set up, real-time, at the location if possible and a means of communicating updated pollution-levels to the public (as is done with the pollen count).

All council vehicles should be converted to electric vehicles. This advertises and sets an example as well as having a real effect on CO2 levels.

We ask that the council stop using the toxic weed killer glyphosate in our green spaces, on verges, etc. which creates problems for human health and is also shown to be damaging to insects such as bees which are vital for pollination.

The Council must resource action by way of enforcement and prosecution for polluters, including fly tippers.

## **3. Transport**

Priority must be given to walkers and cyclists at all times in the design and management of the built environment. More cycle lanes and safe walking routes are needed.

The Council must take all steps possible to reduce the use of petrol and diesel motor vehicles within the District.

The Council should work with HCC to provide far more EV charging points. The technology is there to convert lampposts and have them in more car-parks, community facilities and businesses. Provision should also be made for dwelling houses that do not have off-road parking but have shared parking areas.

All council and contractor vehicles should be EV and a programme started now to phase out petrol/diesel vehicles.

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No new taxi licences should be granted for petrol/diesel vehicles. The entire taxi fleet should comprise EVs in seven years.

Council mileage allowances should be rapidly reduced over time for drivers of non-EVs. The resulting saving should be used to fund additional EV charging points.

The Council can increase car parking charges, introduce workplace parking charges and work with HCC to create ultra-low emission zones and/or congestion charging.

Provide free car parking for car sharing clubs.

Provide free parking for EVs

The Council needs to consider investing in an active travel infrastructure and quality EV based public transport.

#### **4. Information**

The Council must actively engage and inform citizens on climate change starting with an emergency announcement to everyone, on every available media channel. Leaflet homes, place notices in local newspapers, and put it in the council's own publication Outlook, on the web, local Facebook etc.

This feeds into every action and can update and explain every action the Council proposes to take.

The Council should promote recycling, waste reduction and energy consumption management to householders and businesses through a range of workshops, talks and programmes.

A series of autumn talks and lectures is being arranged in Hitchin and Letchworth by the local Green Party and XR with experts in waste, transport, biodiversity, clothing and public policy fields. The Council should support and help fund this project and make it an annual event.

#### **5. Local businesses**

**The Council must work with local businesses to urgently develop a credible plan for the total decarbonisation of the local economy.**

Funding for sustainability, meaning "able to carry on". Several businesses have sustainability issues such as the use of air conditioning vs heating etc. When the business becomes sustainable, awareness can be raised, for example by a notice in the window or in advertising.

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Business parks: the Council should support groups of businesses on business parks or industrial estate to write and implement a sustainability plan.

Financial incentives to go green: business rates could be allowed to vary according to the Green credentials of the business and provide a standard for people to work to. This standard already exists.

## **6. Housing**

Improvements to existing housing stock: Give loans for retrofitting green features/repairs/updates by high skill construction workers familiar with building to Passivhaus standards, supported by a programme of inspection to enforce standards.

The Council do all it can to manage house systems for the ability to recycle water, conserve energy, solar panels etc. and ban the installation of new gas fires and ban open fires.

With regard to construction, ban the use of netting to stop birds nesting. There should be post-occupancy analysis such that the architect continues to monitor and “snag” the design.

A district-wide fuel-poverty report should be commissioned. Climate change, poverty and social justice issues are interlinked.

The Council should adopt a Selective Licensing scheme or schemes to help fund environmental improvements to housing.

## **7. Green Infrastructure**

The Council should

- Create community gardens, woodlands and orchards
- Change planting to weather/drought resistant plants and trees and reduce watering
- Encourage green architecture
- Use council land to drawdown carbon (e.g. tree planting)

## **8. Waste & Recycling**

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·**Adopt circular economy waste policies** – for example in local plans and waste management plans and contracts, as well as promoting community sharing, reuse and recycling

·**Zero waste to landfill or incineration** - in waste disposal contracts ensure biodegradable waste, such as food waste and paper/cardboard, is recycled, composted or used to generate biogas

·Stop charging for brown bins (recycling penalty)

·Charge for unrecycled rubbish

·Support, educate and fund homeowners about water storage and recycling, composting and insulation

Get rid of single use plastics within the Council and its contractors/suppliers

## 9. Energy

·Move quickly to use **only renewable energy**

·Install wind turbines and solar panels in the Council estate, subject to survey.

·Help energy companies target fuel poor or vulnerable households with energy efficiency measures

·**Retrofit council-owned properties** - deep retrofit of all council-owned social housing, schools and other council properties to Energy Performance Certificate C or higher

·**Identify areas suitable for renewable energy in the local plan** - the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that new onshore wind can be approved outside an area “identified as suitable for wind energy” if it is a community-led scheme.

·**Require renewable energy such as solar thermal, PV or heat pumps** – this needs to be done in all local authority developments

·**Commit to opposing fracking and other fossil fuel extraction**

·**Produce biogas** - in the waste contract require the production of biogas from non-recyclable biodegradable waste.

## 10. Other

- **Divest from fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy** projects
- Look into developing **district heating**
- Buy **green energy**
- Set up a **Citizens' Assembly** to resolve issues around climate change

These are just a few suggestions to you. Please work with us to address the climate emergency now. There is so much to do and so little time in which to do it. The Council needs to be brave and radical.

Yours sincerely,

Gilly Chegwyn (XR), Chris Nickolay (XR), Elizabeth Hancock (XR and GP), David de Smet (Labour Party), Sophie Barber (XR), Sue Lines (XR), Donna Murray (XR), Diana Newson (GP), Phil Devonald (XR and GP), Nicky Clark (XR and GP), Rod Hart (XR),  
[REDACTED], David Inward (XR), Mike Eltringham, Deolinda Eltringham (GP), Tim Lee (GP), Hazel Middleton (GP), Raq Dimmock (XR), Arjun Chopra Saf Minney (XR), Ani Sander (XR and GP), Diane Ketcher, Roger Lovegrove