

From: Transition Town Letchworth ttletchworth@googlemail.com
Subject: Fwd: Transition Town Letchworth response to NHDC declaration of a 'Climate Emergency'
Date: 4 September 2019 at 08:04
To: Julia Sonander julia@sonander.org



----- Forwarded message -----

From: Transition Town Letchworth <ttletchworth@googlemail.com>
Date: Mon, Jul 22, 2019 at 7:16 PM
Subject: Transition Town Letchworth response to NHDC declaration of a 'Climate Emergency'
To: Cllr Steve Jarvis <Steve.Jarvis@north-herts.gov.uk>, Claire Morgan <claire.morgan@north-herts.gov.uk>

Dear Steve, Claire

We note that the council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 21 May 2019. As you are probably aware Transition Town Letchworth formed in 2008 and have been undertaking activities to tackle climate change with a local perspective. Our activities range from helping individuals make lifestyle changes through to strategic activities, like producing a proposal for a cycle network. We are keen to work with the council on projects to address climate change going forward, as we have done in the recent past with the Plastic Free Letchworth project and the project to install additional cycle parking at community venues and schools across the town.

The council has a number of ways it can take action to address climate change, including introducing appropriate planning policies, changing the way NHDC services are delivered, working with local community groups and messaging the local population. Having declared a climate emergency it is clearly important to identify the key areas where NHDC can make a difference. This is a question that Transition Town Letchworth put some thought to before we hosted the Environmental Hustings in April 2019. At the time we identified six important areas of NHDC responsibilities where it would be beneficial to have strategies and associated action plans to address climate change. These are described below along with some initial thoughts on possible actions.

Producing Sustainable Travel Town Plans

Reducing the fossil fuels associated with transport is a key area where NHDC can take action. HCC LTP4 (<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/about-the-council/consultations/tp4-local-transport-plan-4-complete.pdf>) contains the concept of Sustainable Travel Towns (p104). Developing Sustainable Travel Town Plans for all North Herts Town seems an important early action for NHDC to take, as our understanding is that funding for Sustainable Transport Initiatives will depend on the existence of appropriate plans. Transition Town Letchworth took part in the LTP4 consultation, meeting up and communicating regularly with the team developing the transport strategy. Our January 2019 and March 2019 Transition Tuesdays identified ideas for helping us move to sustainable transport, ideas that are written up in two blogs, <http://www.transitionletchworth.org/the-future-of-transport-in-leitchworth/> and <http://www.transitionletchworth.org/how-developments-in-transport-can-help-leitchworth-move-to-sustainable-transport/>.

There are local groups who are interested in improving areas of transport, for example, Rail and Bus User groups and cycling groups and we would like to see close working between local communities and the council to develop Sustainable Travel Town plans. However, it would be beneficial for the council to support the development of local transport plans by developing some common guidance and information resources to ensure an efficient planning process with high quality outcomes for each locality. We understand that some parish councils may have started developing their Sustainable Travel Town plans, however, for localities not covered by a Town or Parish Councils, it is important that NHDC put in place appropriate forums to produce Sustainable Travel Town plans.

NHDC also has the opportunity to lead by example switching their vehicle fleet to electric and putting in a charging infrastructure, to encourage the shift to electric vehicles, for example, at Taxi Ranks.

We recognise that there are aspects of transport improvements where responsibilities fall across different authorities and organisations, in particular, in Letchworth, the Heritage Foundation, HCC and NHDC. This has sometimes resulted in stalled initiatives (e.g bike parking in the Town Centre), whilst on other occasions we see these organisations paying for overlapping pieces of work (e.g. Cycling Strategies). Agreeing responsibilities and improved working relationships between HCC, NHDC and Heritage Foundation moving forward would help to ensure these organisations' combined resources deliver maximum value and appropriate levels of public consultation.

Low Carbon Homes

It has become clear that councils can put carbon emissions targets into its planning policies which require performance beyond that contained in the national standards. Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge are local councils who are all utilising this option (see <https://www.ukgbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/The-Policy-Playbook-Feb-2019.pdf>). We believe that NHDC should introduce ambitious emissions targets in their planning policies so that new homes are demonstrably Zero Carbon Homes (the government is expecting to ban gas boilers in new build by 2025) and can maximise their electricity generation potential. Although this activity should be led by the council, educational events for the local community to help them understand the mechanisms for influencing build quality (e.g. Supplementary Planning Documents, Neighbourhood Plans) would ensure that an informed dialogue can occur between NHDC officers and environmental groups in the District.

The majority of our future housing stock is already built. NHDC is involved in approving significant numbers of home improvement activities, so there is an opportunity for the council to use their interactions to educate people, in particular, helping those who are planning home improvements to understand how to use the opportunity to get the best energy efficiency improvements. Transition Town Letchworth members have built up a knowledge base across the type of housing in this area and would be happy to work with the council to develop information resources.

NHDC should undertake a review of their planning guidance to ensure it is supporting local people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes - for example, could planning permission for external insulation (where planning permission is required in the conservation area) be relaxed? In Letchworth a dialogue needs to take place between NHDC and the Heritage Foundation to ensure that out-dated guidance is not leading to excessive carbon emissions and fuel poverty.

Waste

NHDC has been a leader in Hertfordshire in terms of recycling but performance has dropped off slightly. Working with the HCC, NHDC should be helping Hertfordshire move to a circular economy, positively encouraging recycling businesses into the district. TTL believe that there should be a strategy in place that will deliver an ongoing reduction in non-recyclable bin collection frequencies. This strategy will include promoting a reuse approach to living, increase recycling opportunities and working to eliminate products that are difficult to recycle where there are acceptable alternatives. Underlying the strategy will be an ongoing process of public education. TTL view the Plastic Free North Herts campaign, which we will be supporting, as a really positive first step. Encouraging re-use and repair could also bring some new and interesting businesses to help revive our town centres as we identified in our report on maintaining a resilient town centre (<http://www.transitionletchworth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/TTL-vision-for-a-resilient-town-Version-1.pdf>).

NHDC's current commercial waste collection, offered to schools, charities and businesses, allows for separation of co-mingled recyclables, paper and cardboard. NHDC should be looking to enhance / extend the scope of this service, e.g. to include compostables.

Management of Community Spaces - Including Parks / Green Spaces and Allotments

Towns and villages in the country are beginning to use some of their green spaces for community gardens which produce food for the local population. Letchworth has plenty of green spaces. Offering of green spaces to local communities to develop community gardens and orchards could be a quick win for the council. In Letchworth the Heritage Foundation has secured funding for Letchworth to be part of an 'Edible Cities' Research programme, which will provide the town with access to ideas and knowledge, the council offering areas of land for community growing would align well with this project.

Community Energy and Renewables

Transition Town Letchworth has reviewed the town's roofs for opportunities for rooftop 'solar farms'. There are opportunities, some of which are associated with buildings owned by NHDC (e.g. the Letchworth Leisure Centre which has a suitable roof and is a high energy user). The reduction in the cost of solar energy and the change in the subsidy regime makes this a good time to review the potential for solar systems and TTL would be happy to share our knowledge on the potential for solar PV and solar thermal installations in Letchworth.

Town Planning

The current local plan has been based around the concept of expanding existing towns where there are existing community facilities but it has eroded the Green Belt and placed housing more than a 'sustainable travel distance' from community facilities. After the further hearings to be announced and the inspector's report, it will not be long before the next Local Plan is required for North Herts and the potential for a New Low Carbon Garden City is one which we think NHDC should embrace.

Transition Town Letchworth have held a number of open events over the years to explore climate change solutions. We have found that we attract a wider section of the community to engage when we focus on a particular topic area to explore solutions. Trying to explore different solution areas at the same event can deter people with a particular expertise from attending and contributing. For example, many of the people interested in producing a cycling strategy were not interested in widening this to a walking strategy and many of those interested in cycling are not particularly interested in learning about permaculture. There are a cohort of people who have a 'big picture' vision and will be interested in engaging with the overarching strategic vision for tackling climate change and if you do decide to work with the community at this level TTL has members who would be happy to be involved. However, we believe that engagement with the community at a topic level may lead to the most effective community engagement.

We look forward to hearing the council's next steps on tackling the 'Climate Emergency' and we are always happy to meet with you to chat through ideas.

Best wishes

Julia Sonander
for the Transition Town Letchworth Trustees

"We are a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. The objects of the CIO are

- To raise awareness within Letchworth (and its environs) of Resource Depletion and Climate Change;
- To support the community to develop a low carbon, sustainable and resilient future for Letchworth (and its environs);
- To create and to help implement an Energy Descent Action Plan for Letchworth to systematically reduce fossil fuel dependence.

We deliver our objectives through education events and projects which model a more sustainable way of life.

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