

Third draft climate change and environmental strategy for Aylesford Parish Council

Forward

MPs approved a motion to declare an environment and climate emergency on May 1st 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48126677> . Kent County Council recognised the UK climate emergency at a County Council meeting on 23 May 2019 <https://www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/climate-change/climate-emergency-statement> and TMBC followed suit on July 9th 2019. <https://data.climateemergency.uk/councils/tonbridge-and-malling-borough-council/>

There is no single definition of what a climate emergency actually means but many local areas say they want to be carbon-neutral by 2030. This includes TMBC. <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/downloads/download/91/climate-change-strategy> . The current UK Government target is to become carbon neutral by 2050.

The relationship between carbon dioxide and global climate change may be understood by referring to studies undertaken by the Royal Society. <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/climate-change-evidence-causes/>

The reasons for the sudden concern now include increasing instances of extreme weather around the globe. Weather in Kent seems to be improving, apart from storms, which continue to break records, and the slow rise in sea level, which is accelerating, but we also share the planet with a lot of other people. Examples of unfavourable changes elsewhere include hot weather in India and Pakistan.

As an example of the kinds of events now happening across the World, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, writing in the Guardian newspaper recently said: “The apocalyptic rains and floods that hit Pakistan last summer claimed 1,700 lives, left a swathe of territory the size of Switzerland under water and affected 33 million people – more people than live in most European countries.

“International attention has receded, but the waters have not. Large parts of Sindh and Balochistan provinces remain inundated. The number of food-insecure people in Pakistan has doubled to 14 million; another 9 million have been pushed into extreme poverty. These flooded areas now look like a huge series of permanent lakes, transforming forever the terrain and the lives of people living there. No amount of pumps can remove this water in less than a year; and by July 2023, the worry is that these areas may flood again.

“Pakistan is suffering not just from flooding but from recurring climate extremes – earlier in spring 2022, the country was in the grip of a scorching, drought-aggravating heatwave that caused forest fires in the west. The fact that some of the same areas that received record temperatures were subsequently submerged underlines the sharp swings in weather patterns that are becoming a norm.”
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jan/06/pakistan-floodwaters-climate-disasters-international-aid>

In addition, numerous scientific studies of Earth's ancient history have shown that average temperature is closely related to CO₂ levels, which have on occasion been much higher, even than today, allowing the poles to develop a tropical climate, very heavy rainfall and greatly increased sea levels. <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2019/06/data-from-earths-past-holds-a-warning-for-our-future-under-climate-change/>

The problem seems to be accelerating. The average temperature has increased a little, and its increase is accelerating, but 3 x sigma, which represents outlying heat events now affects 10% of the global land area instead of 0.13%.

http://www.columbia.edu/%7Ejeh1/mailings/2012/20120803_DicePopSci.pdf. We are also seeing the effects of positive feedback, which is what happens when you put a microphone too close to a loudspeaker and the sound from the speaker feeds back into the microphone until the system becomes unusable. In the case of climate, forest and grass fires release CO₂ held in vegetation back into the atmosphere, ice melts and the seas reflect sunlight less, and the methane hydrates in the Northern Hemisphere decompose, releasing methane, which is a global warming gas 25 times as effective as CO₂.

Past extreme events include weather bombs, more scientifically referred to as temperature inversions, evidently somewhat worse than the one recently suffered by the United States, where mammoths grazing in Siberia on lush green vegetation were suddenly quick frozen, with the vegetation still in their stomachs.

So what can we do about this situation?.

In 2021, the National Association of Local Councils published a 24 page document entitled, "What can local councils do on climate".

As approximately 30% of England is parished, NALC says it believes that tackling the effects of climate change should be a priority for all local councils.

The first parish council in Tonbridge and Malling to come up with and adopt a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan is Shipbourne, which was adopted on October 10th 2022) .

They started by using the free climate Impact Tool. <https://impact-tool.org.uk> to establish the situation in their parish.

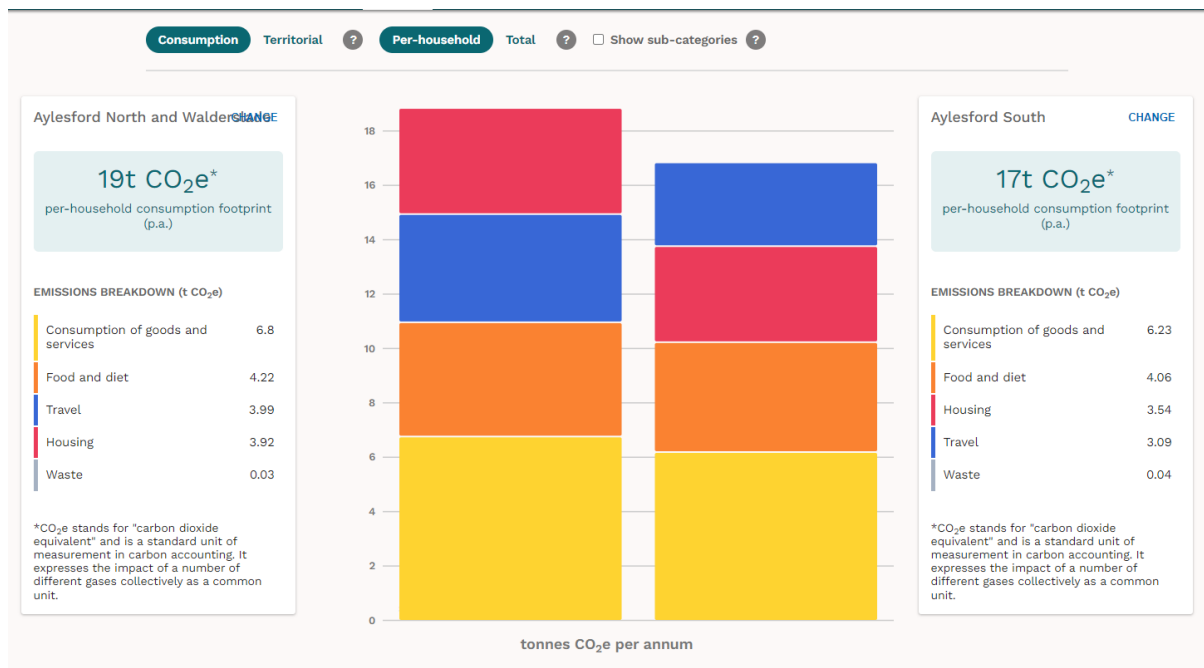
Below are comparisons of the carbon footprint of Aylesford and Kent, Aylesford and Tonbridge and Malling and Aylesford North and South.



Aylesford and Kent County carbon footprints per household



Aylesford and Tonbridge and Malling Carbon footprints per household



Aylesford North and Walderslade Carbon footprints per household

It can at once be seen that Aylesford comes out about the same as the rest of Tonbridge and Malling but is well above the overall figure for Kent as a whole.

Aylesford North has a slightly higher average than Aylesford South, perhaps reflecting difference in prosperity.

What can we do about it?

The most sensible approach is to start with the simplest and easiest things to do.

Trees and hedges

Aylesford Parish Council owns and manages a number of pieces of land. While these are mostly for outdoor recreation and sport, they have boundaries and while these boundaries already have some trees and hedges, there are a lot of gaps.

The obvious approach is to fill the gaps. The least expensive way of doing this which would be to have a Seed Gathering and Planting Sunday or Sundays. I have put this to the Climate Change Forum and the idea has been greeted with some enthusiasm, so it may be taken up across the borough.

The idea, which has been tried before, is for families to collect sweet chestnuts, horse chestnuts and acorns, and ash seeds and other tree seeds if available, and plant them in rows, under the supervision of somebody who has an agreed plan of where the seeds will go. It will be necessary to plant a surplus, because squirrels will see them as a food source, and later thin out in stages when the saplings have grown. Choosing local trees as a seed source will ensure compatibility with the soil type in any location. As an experiment, I planted a sweet chestnut, and a horse chestnut together in my front garden, both of which grew, along with an old fashioned cherry tree and an oak

which seem to have been planted by birds or squirrels. The sweet chestnut has grown fastest and the oak slowest.

I should like to start by filling in the gaps where trees have gone and not been replaced round Tunbury Recreation Ground, particularly on the West and South sides.



South Side with gaps between the trees



Further along South Side



West side where most of the trees have gone



Looking South from West side



Looking East from West side



East side which has a nice hedge and the start of a walk with benches but no trees



South East corner



Tunbury Hall Car Park with gaps between the three trees

The trees should be of different types to encourage biodiversity. The easiest to grow are sweet chestnuts, which are very easy to grow and grow faster than anything else, and only require popping a chestnut into a hole in the ground. This is perhaps the reason for the large amount of chestnut coppice in Kent. Oak trees are good because they look grand and are hosts to so many other species. Most of the acorns found on the ground are acorns that have been attacked by insects, so it is necessary either to harvest acorns from the trees or plant a lot. May I also make a case for fruit trees, especially older varieties of apple. A few examples of old types of apple tree survive along edges of old orchards, such as along North Dane Way. Older varieties of apple were less sweet and larger trees than modern varieties but the apples kept much longer, without having to recourse to carbon dioxide storage or waxing. Kent is also a traditional place to have cherry trees. English apricots are also suitable for our climate. If children pick and eat them, that would be good. And we should also add hazel nut trees, good for various kinds of wildlife, and walnut trees. There are deliciously eatable varieties of blackberry planted at Leybourne Lakes and people are encouraged to collect them. (Completely wild blackberries are smaller and distinctly sour). Should anyone wish to consult professional experts, we have one of the world's leading centres of excellence at East Malling.

Also, we might plant some traditional hedges. Hawthorn provides food for birds throughout winter and holly, as well as providing berries, is an evergreen, and being prickly, is a favoured habitat for small birds, since cats cannot get in there and eat their chicks. We also have an old hedging variety of juniper round part of our meadow. You can cook with the

berries, which are a type of pine cone, although they require considerably preparation. The same goes for wild rose hips. Since wooden fences are increasingly likely to be blown down by storms, planting hedges reduces the number of trees that have to be cut down to make fences.

The Woodland Trust provides free trees and hedge packs to community organisations such as ourselves

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/>

The site says, “We are currently taking applications for trees to be delivered in NOVEMBER 2023. Applications for November delivery are expected to close in August or sooner depending on stock availability.”

There are various government grants for establishing woodlands and lines of trees along footpaths and even for planting individual trees.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woodland-grants-and-incentives-overview-table/woodland-grants-and-incentives-overview-table>

There is also support for tree planting via TMBC

<https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/climate-change/read-tree-charter/3>

There is also government support for planting and maintaining hedges

<https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/planting-new-hedges-bn11>

We should take advantage of these schemes wherever possible.

Encouraging Re-use

Re-use as opposed to recycling eliminates the carbon footprint associated with manufacturing. I am aware of various re-use initiatives in Medway so I asked whether anything similar was going on in Aylesford. I asked Carrie Spencer, the TMBC Climate Change Officer, if she knew of anything local, to which we replied: “On re-use I’m afraid I’m not aware of any in the Aylesford parish but that is not to say they don’t exist! I think the nearest one to you might be Malling Repair Café. I wondered if you might have heard of Terra Cycle, and if this might be something your parish might be interested in? They recycle everything (from VHS tapes to cracker and biscuit wrappers) using their zero waste boxes:

https://shop.terracycle.com/en-GB?utm_source=tc&utm_medium=header&utm_campaign=main”

Fran Long of the Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group has just brought this idea to my attention.

<https://www.kentonline.co.uk/malling/news/dont-replace-your-tech-let-us-help-you-fix-it-281796/>

Team repair is based in West Malling.

In Medway the Medway Volunteer Workshop works with *Tools with a Mission* who collect unwanted hand and powered tools, computers and sewing machines across Kent and the rest of the UK. These are refurbished and compiled into trade kits, which are sent to Africa to equip people who have recently completed training schemes so they can earn a sustainable living.

<https://medwayvolunteerworkshop.co.uk/aboutus>

Mrs Rizwana Shelley hosts a WhatsApp Group that puts people in her community in with things they want to get rid of, such as toys, saucepans, printers, and child bicycles and scooters in touch with people who want them.

The Octopus Foundation on the Medway City Estate collects good quality wood for its carpentry workshops. <https://theoctopusfoundation.org.uk/cre8/>

I am not sure but I wonder if there is something we could do with RBLI.

Managing our own estate

As well as reducing the amount of carbon dioxide being put back into the environment, the present high cost of energy offers an additional incentive to look at how best to manage assets that we own and reduce energy wastage and save money.

We have already converted all our lighting both indoor and street lights, to LEDs, although I am not clear where we are with the Aylesford Bridge lights.

At home, I am awaiting a quotation for photovoltaic panels from Greenman Solar based in Ashford <https://www.greenmansolar.com> who were recommended to us. The man who came to see our house said most of our roof was not oriented in the right direction so return on investment might be poor, but from what he said, the roof of the Aylesford Parish Council office could be more promising. If it is a choice between PV panels and extending the cemetery, which would may have a similarly long term return on investment, I am tempted to quote Luke 9:60.

For those seeking to produce surplus energy, following the closure of the Feed-in Tariff (FIT) scheme to new applicants in March 2019, the government recognised the need to pay small-scale renewable energy generators for the electricity they export to the grid. Consequently, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) introduced the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG). <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/environmental-and-social-schemes/smart-export-guarantee-seg>

This includes solar PV systems, onshore wind, anaerobic digestion, hydro – up to 5MW, and Micro-CHP – with an electrical capacity of up to 50kW.

Ensuring competence

Since competence in installing such things as heat pumps, photovoltaics, and extra insulation is somewhat lacking, it is essential that if we were to follow any of these paths, we no longer just ask for three quotations but also ask to be able to contact previous customers willing to endorse similar work done for them.

Planning

While our powers are limited, we do have influence, and can bring matters to the attention of planning officers that they may not have thought of. It is not true that developers and TMBC take no notice at all of what we tell them. They may not do what we want, but there are various examples of where our input has led to changes of plan.

Questions we should ask about relevant planning applications

What are they doing to maintain and/or improve biodiversity?

What is their plan as regards existing trees and planting new ones?

What is their plan as regards existing hedges and planting new ones?

Where is drainage water going now and going to go in future?

(There is a need to re-charge aquifers especially as droughts are likely to be more common in future)

What is their plan as regards flood risk?

Are there any springs on this piece of land? Where does the water go?

How do they propose to meet the requirements of government legislation, now in force, requiring that CO2 emissions from new build homes must be around 30% lower than current standards and emissions from other new buildings, including offices and shops, must be reduced by 27%?

Are they planning to install any photovoltaic panels or solar hot water heating panels?

How is the proposed development going to be insulated to conserve heat in winter and reduce cooling requirements in Summer?

Are they planning to introduce any electric vehicle charging points?

Bicycles

A point raised by Cllr Walker is: "I should just like to mention cyclists. If we want more people getting on their bikes we need more cycle pods like the one shown below. People spend a lot on bikes and the prices are going up. They need to feel that their bike is safe and will be there when they go to get a train. I think they should be installed at all leisure facilities."



Tom Shelley

February 12th 2023