



Sustainable Overton Group TOOLKIT

HOW TO SET UP A CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNITY GROUP - TOOLKIT FOR PARISH COUNCILS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

DECEMBER 2020 and updated MARCH 2025

A QUICK INTRO...

Climate change is the defining crisis of our time, and it is happening faster than we feared. But we are not powerless. In October 2019, our village declared a climate emergency and founded a community group, Sustainable Overton. 5 years after taking that collective decision, we're sharing what we have learned.

Here you'll find a practical toolkit, produced with kind support from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council. The purpose of this is to help other Parish and Town Councils or community groups and local authorities together to set up and effectively run a climate change community group, so that we can achieve our target of being a carbon neutral village. We hope that by sharing our learning over the last year, we can help others progress more easily and quickly.

If you're reading this, perhaps you're in the same position we were in when we first set up. We didn't know where our journey would take us, or what it would look like. Some of us had limited knowledge about the climate crisis apart from what we picked up around the periphery of our lives and jobs. What we didn't realise was how many knowledgeable people lived in our parish, nor that they would be unexpectedly generous with their free time. It has been enlightening, hard work, fun, and sometimes challenging, but overall a positive and energising experience, with like-minded people coming together. We discovered a profound sense of community spirit in our village, strengthened and rekindled by our joint desire to make a real difference.

Since we first launched this toolkit in 2020, we have had many heartwarming messages and phone calls from other parishes and groups who have been inspired to set up their own campaigns. Our campaign is ongoing, so we will continue to add to this resource, and to keep sharing and working together at parish, borough and county level to make a tangible collective difference.

For background, Overton is a village of nearly 5000 residents situated 9 miles west of Basingstoke, North Hampshire. We have an old village centre, around which many new houses have been built. We also have a train station, many commuters to London, a vibrant high street, a number of farms and some industrial units.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

The toolkit is arranged under 10 key headings to help you quickly find the information you need. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see how we could have done some things better, so we have highlighted the lessons we learned along the way. We appreciate every parish is different, and you will want to find your own path, selecting projects that work for you.

“I CANNOT OVERSTATE THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PART OF A COMMUNITY ON A MISSION.”

SO VOLUNTEER, 2020.

“NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD: INDEED, IT’S THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.”

MARGARET MEAD, ANTHROPOLOGIST, RECIPIENT OF THE PLANETARY CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARD IN 1978.

Basingstoke and Deane borough council said:

The Council is delighted that Overton is making such good progress with their local actions and that they have offered to produce this toolkit for other local councils to follow. The willingness to share their successes and to highlight barriers and obstacles is testimony to the way town and parish councils are open to working in a collaborative and supportive way across the Basingstoke and Deane Borough to tackle climate change.

- Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council 2019

01. DECLARATION OF WHAT YOU INTEND TO DO

HOW SUSTAINABLE OVERTON WAS BORN

In September 2019, Overton Parish Council, along with Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, and many other councils throughout the UK, declared a Climate Emergency. As most of you will be aware, this is a UK-wide grassroots movement by ordinary people as well as local authorities who care about our environment. The initial goal was to become a carbon neutral community by 2030. This was an ambitious goal, and as we soon realised, not realistically achievable in this timeframe, but we realised that action needed to happen now to prevent catastrophic and irreversible damage.

Five years later, some may argue that the time for declarations of a climate emergency has passed, and that the majority of people recognise that there is a need for action to mitigate climate change. What is still important, in our view, is that you have a clear statement of intent. The UK Government has a target of net zero by 2050, and your local council may have a more ambitious target. Regardless, community groups will play a vital role in helping residents in this challenging transition, which represents a step change in behaviours and actions for all. This will include a transition away from fossil fuels to better insulated houses powered largely by heat pumps, and a transition to electric vehicles and electrified public transport, as well as other changes such as a more circular economy where things are reused, repaired, repurposed or recycled, and dietary changes of eating less meat and dairy.

The initial request came from a parishioner, and then was voted on by Overton Parish Council. The vote was not unanimous. This highlighted the first obstacle that other parishes may face: gaining support. However if you are just looking for general support for a local sustainability group this is less likely to be an issue.

LEARNING POINT:

WHY YOU NEED PARISH COUNCIL SUPPORT

- **Credibility:** being part of the Parish Council lends major credibility and opens doors. I doubt if we could have achieved half of what we have if we were not linked to them, and had Parish Councillors working with us.
- **Financial history:** if you want to apply for many grants, such as the CEF (Community Energy Fund), you need a financial history. A Parish Council can provide this. As your projects grow, you may need to set up some form of cooperative instead. We started off as a working group of the parish council, and some other local groups in other parishes have become sub committees. However, as we progressed, we had 2 of our own bank accounts (repair café/general and nappy library) so we needed to become a separate group. We are now, 5 years later, setting up as a CIO. The Parish Council have kindly offered to still provide support and we will now have more freedom in terms of applying for grants, and our projects.
- **Insurance** – it was not much more to insure SO under the Parish Council insurance, and cheaper than getting our own quote. This was particularly important for the repair café, given that they carry out activities such as electrical repairs and PAT testing. Although there are now repair café insurance products out there that are not too expensive.

LEARNING POINT:

HOW TO GAIN SUPPORT FROM THE PARISH OR TOWN COUNCIL

It became clear during the vote that the concept of a “climate emergency declaration” proved an unattractive concept. It may help to understand the variety and complexity of valid reasons for not wanting to declare, so that these can be listened to and addressed beforehand:

Too high a workload: many councillors are already working full time, and volunteer as parish councillors in their spare time. If they are already at capacity, extra work of this nature seems untenable. Particularly if there are vacant spaces on the council.

- Ways to work around this: Trying to recruit and co-opt some more councillors if there are vacancies can clearly help this, so workloads can be shared out. Also, finding existing councillors or volunteers who are prepared to give their time can also mitigate this.
- What are we as a Parish Council supposed to do? There can be an understandable reluctance to take something like this on, as once a “climate emergency” is declared, the residents will expect to see some action. And what action should it be? It can seem overwhelming as a small village to tackle what is not just a UK wide issue but a global problem.
- How to counteract this: Having some clear, realistic objectives and strategies can be useful to help mitigate this concern. The role of a Parish Council in this instance is to engage with the local community, make clear and simple information available, and encourage people to make a few small changes. And many of these changes are free, or save money. If everyone does something, however small, that starts to add up to a significant change. Multiply this by many parishes, many counties..... change really can initiate from a grassroots level. Also, this can empower local residents to feel they are “doing their bit” in an area which is a grave concern to many. Also, it will show positive visible action, which is a great story for the annual parish meeting.
- What difference can we make, we’re just a small village? This is the “look at what China/the USA are doing.....” argument. And a valid point. However, this underestimates the power of small groups of people to create lasting and significant change. To overcome this concern, you could also highlight some of the benefits of declaring a climate emergency that we discovered later on: engendering a real sense of community, creating a feeling of empowerment against a depressing and concerning situation, and leading to kudos and positive appreciation for the Council, as they are seen to be tackling this. Many of the activities we do can create a real sense of wellbeing too, which is important. NALC also have an online document on climate change to help parish councils in this area. In addition, with the hotter summers and wetter winters, there may be issues around flooding in your parish, and issues with dehydration and keeping cool – particularly in more vulnerable groups, so some adaptation strategies may be required going forwards.

02. RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS & SKILLS AUDIT

At the start, when we called our first public meeting, there were a handful of parish councillors and a few parishioners that had come forward when reading the council meeting notes. A good start but not enough to achieve what we wanted.

LEARNING POINT:

HOW TO BUILD UP YOUR TEAM

Publicise at every opportunity

- Publicise meetings – noticeboards, social media, posters.
- Keep asking for more volunteers, and call for specific skills if you need them (e.g. can you help build a website, are you a graphic designer?).
- Communicate what you are doing through all your existing communication channels. This might be a parish newsletter, a noticeboard, a Facebook page or Instagram accounts. Also there may be useful local Facebook groups that can help share the information.
- Write press releases for local papers, contact local TV or radio stations
- Talk to everyone you can think of: your local business association, local clubs and societies, local businesses, local dignitaries, any local celebrities, local churches, schools.

Use your networks – never miss an opportunity to have a “climate conversation”

- Try to find people who have good connections in your parish. Some people are “movers and shakers”. Get people talking about this.
- It’s not necessarily who you know, its who your contacts know. LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, whatever social media you engage with - make it work for you.
- Social events are also a great source of networking.
- Most of our volunteers work full time, many have young families, and even if retired have many other commitments. Make it easy for them to “dip their toe in” without fear of becoming overwhelmed.
- We also found that new people in the village were particularly interested in volunteering, perhaps to make friends and get involved in their local community. So, maybe talk to your local estate agents, do a door drop in a new housing development.
- Publicise small jobs – e.g. we need 10 people to plant trees – 1 or 2 hours on a Sunday morning. Or someone to make tea once a month at the repair café.
- Post pictures and short videos of what you’ve already done on social media. Make it look fun.

03. VALUES & NAMES

WHAT ARE YOUR GROUP VALUES?

It was agreed that we wanted to come across in a positive, enabling, empowering, upbeat, non-political, non-judgemental, non-critical and inclusive way. We did not want to depress people or scare them about climate change, but to encourage them to realise that every person doing just a few things differently, even imperfectly, makes a difference, and together we make a big difference. This was important as we needed to appeal to everyone in the community.

We agreed that we would be a democratic organisation, with key issues debated and a consensus agreed, and that everyone's voice was important. We would respect each other, we can still debate and disagree, or lobby, but in a constructive way. We also wanted to be seen as a contemporary, upbeat organisation, non-judgemental or critical of anyone else, just happy if people choose to make even a couple of small changes. We were open about the fact that we were not experts, or there to tell other people what to do, and that we would in all likelihood make mistakes, but learn from them. We wanted to come across as friendly and approachable. These empowering values are reflected in our Sustainable Overton brand.

The name was agreed to be Sustainable Overton, after a democratic suggestions and short list, and a vote.

04. STRUCTURE & PROCESSES

THE BASICS – HOW WE SET UP AND RAN THE GROUP

After declaring a climate emergency in September, in October 2019 Overton Parish Council (OPC) called a meeting for interested parties to become involved in the Climate Emergency project. We had a good turnout, with a mix of people with a variety of useful skills and knowledge, or just some enthusiasm and motivation to get something positive done. Several of the Parish Councillors also joined the meeting and offered to get stuck in.

From our initial meeting it was decided to set up a steering committee and 6 sub-groups:

- **Energy**
- **Transport**
- **Environment**
- **Waste reduction**
- **Business and Education (this includes churches, clubs and societies)**
- **Communication and Events**

Various communication methods were swiftly set up; a group email list (with appropriate GDPR agreement from all parties) and Dropbox for communications. Later, we set up our website, Facebook page, Twitter (as was) and Instagram accounts. Overton also has a monthly newsletter “News and Views” in which we could put a column or an insert each month, which we use each month to update everyone on what’s going on.

Each group was responsible for looking at their own area, and setting their own objectives and strategies. This would then be for discussion with the steering committee, or strategy group, and fed into the overall plan. We agreed that each sub-group would meet monthly in between the steering committee meetings, either at someone’s house or in the pub (in the pre and post-COVID months of course), and then report back on their plans/actions. Each group was asked to produce an agenda and minutes for each meeting, with clear actions highlighted.

These were then to be placed in the Dropbox so that everyone could access them.

We did find that not everyone found using Dropbox easy, many of us forgot to load up documents.

SETTING UP A STEERING COMMITTEE

We decided that there should be a steering committee made up of a representative from each of the groups, who would meet monthly. This would not necessarily be “the leader”, but simply a spokesperson. After the first few meetings where we invited anyone in the parish that was interested (as we wanted and needed to find more volunteers and expertise), the meetings became rather cumbersome to run, as it was difficult to “steer” and discuss things in such a large forum, and there were simply too many agenda items for an hour’s meeting. It was also time-consuming to do necessary things such as greet everyone, remember everyone’s name and face and connect the two

(not always easy for some of us). Also, we needed to talk to everyone new and find out what they wanted, what their skills and experience was.

LEARNING POINT:

ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS AND NOT LETTING THEM DRIFT AWAY

Welcoming committee: this was a little haphazard at first, so with hindsight we suggest:

- Form a small team of people to welcome volunteers, take their names, emails and phone numbers, and a few details about what they are interested in helping with, and any relevant skills or experience they have.
- Make everyone feel valued and a part of the group. You could use a basic skills audit, as long as you don't frighten away anyone who may have time and enthusiasm but doesn't feel they have many skills. Everyone has strengths, they just often don't realise exactly what they are.

Delegate, and respect peoples' time

- Have a separate person to take the minutes, and someone to chair the meeting, others on refreshments.
- Make sure you have a published agenda, and stick to it, and endeavour to keep the meeting to time (we didn't always manage this at first). If people want to stay and chat afterwards that's great, but those who need to get home can do so.

Get to know your team: As the initial chair of the group I spent a lot of time meeting up with people individually as far as possible, to connect with them, tap into their knowledge, and find out how best to engage with them. Ideally have 2 or more people running the group, to share out the work, otherwise it can become a bottleneck or too onerous for one person.

Now that we are more established, we meet every 2 months for 1.5 hours in person (an open meeting for new people to come along to), and have whatsapp groups for the other teams. Other meetings are now more ad hoc, dependent on need.

TRACK PROGRESS OF EACH PROJECT

With the best will in the world, it's easy for things to take a long time, or not get anywhere at all.

Each project needs someone to drive it forward if you want results. Obvious to say, but not always easy to deliver.

- It's good if you can have one or two people in charge of monitoring all the projects. Sometimes you do have to shelve or postpone projects. However, if nothing gets delivered the whole group will become demotivated.
- It can be easier to go for the "low hanging fruit" to start with, while working on longer term projects in the background, to maintain the momentum.

We reported to the Parish Council monthly to give an update on what was happening. In between times, approvals were also sought on things like signing off on newsletters or key projects.

Because so much was happening, our learning here was that it can be better to give a written one page summary and circulate beforehand, so that parish council members have time to process it and ask any questions, they can also feel comfortable that things are being run effectively and well, and also they have a record of things. Give people time to give their input – this can be invaluable - and keep them on board with what is happening.

LEARNING POINT:

Offer help, and remain flexible on different technologies

Some volunteers were not au fait with some technologies (either due to experience/age or through not wishing to use certain social media).

Ways to address this can be:

- Offer to help anyone set up Dropbox or Zoom – recognise that this is uncharted territory for some people.
- You may have to find an easier alternative such as just emailing documents and information. You can't force someone to use WhatsApp, Zoom, Excel or Dropbox if they don't want to, or find it difficult, don't have the programme or don't have the relevant technology to support it. Be flexible. People can be reluctant to say that this is difficult for them, and this might be a cause of stress.

LEARNING POINT:

FUNDING

We discussed funding, and agreed that we would initially run the group with a small allowance from the Parish Council if needed, and apply for funding from other bodies if required, and rely mainly on the goodwill of volunteers. You can try:

- Your Parish Council - they may be prepared to make an allowance to cover printing or web costs, or combine your message with a current media for economies of scale. Although, if you have a repair café up and running, the donations can bring in enough money to cover not just their room hire and insurance, but also other projects potentially.
- Hampshire County Council Waste Prevention team, who supplied us not just with free training but also some giveaways and electronic information/posters etc that we could use as Food Waste Champions. They currently run a £5000 waste prevention grant each year.
- Our energy hub (Greater South East Energy Hub) can help with grants such as the CEF for community energy projects.
- Sometimes businesses also offer grants for innovative ideas, worth checking with your local community voluntary action group. (for us BVA in Basingstoke www.bvaction.co.uk)

- From participants in workshops: If we ran workshops that required buying things, we asked for a small donation to cover the costs (e.g. cost of beeswax wraps materials).

CARE FOR YOUR VOLUNTEERS

We have learned that volunteers have to step away or leave at certain times – for a variety of reasons – be that work pressure or family issues, illness, new babies, other commitments, personality clashes, or sometimes people can give too much and get burnt out. This is particularly important to watch out for. People can only give so much, so it's important to have enough coverage so that the work can be spread out effectively and fairly.

Obviously, it's important to treat all volunteers with respect, and kindness, and provide support to each other when things seem overwhelming. We spent a lot of time getting to know volunteers, having meetings or chats over coffee (when COVID allowed), and just checking in on them. It's not only an important investment in each person, it's also very effective in finding out what people's strengths are, so tasks can be changed around to suit these. Also, a positive and understanding culture means that people feel they can step away for a bit and then come back later, without worrying they have let anyone down.

05. RESEARCH & IDENTIFY KNOWLEDGE GAP

As most of us did not have a vast amount of knowledge in this area, we started educating ourselves by researching – starting with neighbouring parishes, who were extremely helpful and supportive, and happy to share their own learning with us. We also researched into other villages or towns to see what we could learn from them.

This provided lots of learning and options – such as the importance of endeavouring to work with the local school, and a nearby university if you have one. The school is key, as not only are they working with the new younger generation, but this learning they engages parents, grandparents, carers, which is a huge part of the village. However, the challenge is that schools are really busy with many commitments, so it can be difficult to build relationships. It helps if someone in the group has a contact - such as a governor.

Learning and researching is a continual process, as each project forces you to ensure that anything you are saying is fact-checked, that you can quote your sources, and that they are reliable. There is a lot of erroneous information out there on an unsuspecting internet search. There is also some conflicting or negative information. Things are not always straightforward, and some issues are quite complex. It's important that key team members are able to answer these types of questions (in a positive way) to retain and build the credibility of your group. There can be many critics out there happy to point out your faults. For this reason, and to fit with our values, we agreed to make it clear that we are a group of volunteers who are learning as we go, just as most residents will be, and we will endeavour to provide the most accurate information, to the best of our knowledge, but we also acknowledge that we may make mistakes. We therefore welcome constructive criticism from parishioners, as it helps us learn, and also shows a level of engagement. This is also a good opportunity to encourage people with useful knowledge to help you.

We have also conducted some research into what residents think about climate change, and recycling, what the barriers are, and what ideas they have to help. A summary of this is [here](#).

GRANTS:

Once you have identified some potential projects, there are quite a few grants from local government or other organisations that groups can apply for. We suggest contacting your local community action group (for us, BVA www.bvaction.org.uk) they can help – they often have a grants newsletter. Also, they can assist with filling in the grant forms – which can sometimes be quite onerous, and take time to get things like a quote.

LEARNING POINTS:

WASTE AND RECYCLING GROUP

- Know who does what: our district council collects waste, our county council disposes of it.
- Find out what happens to our household waste. Currently our grey bin contents gets incinerated with energy recovery, dry mixed recyclables (green bin) gets sorted and the "good bits" are baled and sent off to re-processors, glass boxes sent for recycling, garden waste (a collection residents have to pay for) gets composted. From October 2025, the council are starting a food waste collection, followed by additional plastic recycling, so our group can have a role in helping people understand what goes where.

- There is a lot of confusion around recycling- different counties collect different things.
- Know what can be recycled via the local Household Waste Recycling Centres: They currently take batteries, electrical items, fluorescent lights, wood, green waste, plaster board as well as general household waste. Some items have to be paid for (e.g. plasterboard). Our Overton Hill recycling site currently takes glass, small electrical, aluminium, clothes, and shoes.
- Find out about other recyclers: Such as local Salvation Army banks, book banks, shoe and bag banks, charity shops, TerraCycle and so on. Click [here](#) for more information.
- The Eco group at the church and SO set up our own recycling point at our local St. Mary's church, together to collect more items than the council were able to collect.
- Data sources: WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) has some great information and resources [here](#).
- Information on any local shops or producers where residents can buy zero waste products is a great starting point to arming people with where to start on buying less packaging. We are lucky to have our own Village Refillery to help us. Our plastic free team do a plastic free audit to help local businesses become more sustainable.

WASTE PREVENTION COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Hampshire County Council provided a day of training for 6 of us, with particular focus on food waste prevention and home composting. We are now able to run workshops, write articles, and run stalls to help people address the huge amount of food waste we create in Hampshire (about 1/3 of all black bag waste in Hampshire is food waste, most of which could have been eaten). This is a huge issue – it accounts for around 8% of global warming. It can be tackled by education about meal planning, shopping with a list, portion measurement, food use by dates, fridge temperatures, knowing what can be frozen, learning better cooking skills, and using up leftovers. It would also save the average family an estimated £70 per month.



Two of our Food Waste Champions at a green fair.

UNDERSTANDING THE WASTE HIERARCHY

People are often very motivated to recycle and get frustrated when they don't know what to do with certain items. However, the best option is reducing our waste, followed by reusing or refurbishing (e.g. repair café), recycling and composting, other recovery, and finally disposal (incinerator or landfill). The most sustainable focus is to work on items further up the diagram.



TRANSPORT GROUP

Information and resources for the Clean Air Day campaign can be found [here](#). You can also become a Clean Air Day supporter for free and use their logo on your website and access resources for free.

- HCC have teamed up with the charity Living Streets to provide resources and information for walk to school week, which can be found [here](#).
- Engine idling campaigns: this is an offence now, with a possible £20 fine. We had some permanent lamppost signs made (approved by SSEN and the council) that we have put up around our school and our shops.

ENVIRONMENT GROUP

- Take stock of your local environment: the local ecology, land use, landowners, development plans, stakeholder/interest groups and more.
- Connect with like-minded groups in the area. In our case, the Overton Biodiversity Society, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wilder team.
- One of the major applications of an environmental group will be practical implementation of eco-friendly projects that enhance the local environment. Examples of this could include one or more community gardens, hedgerow maintenance, tree plantings, endangered species surveys, building/village square maintenance and more. These require a team of volunteers who are willing to get involved and so we have found that recruiting energetic and engaged volunteers should be a high priority. Furthermore, a willingness to lead community activities is important, as people are generally inclined to join pre-organised activities/projects if they have time.
- In terms of making large-scale positive environmental impacts, the two most important sources to connect with are large landowners and local MPs/Borough Councillors. Having an understanding of the Environmental Land Management scheme in agricultural policy is helpful in supporting landowners in their transition to more environmental land management and farming practices. This can be found on the government website [here](#).
- Furthermore, having an understanding of and sourcing a demand for ecologically produced agricultural products can be a benefit for the environment. Working together to demonstrate to the Borough Council and local MP what the community wants is also a way to positively impact the environment.

- Free tree packs are available from organisations such as the Woodland Trust or the Tree Council if you are successful in applying. Be aware these are normally quite small whips, which require watering and looking after until they are more established.

BUSINESS, SCHOOLS, CHURCH, CLUBS AND SOCIETIES GROUP

This group concentrated on forming relationships with key groups in the community:

- Local school, churches and businesses– both individually and via our local business association
- Guides/Scouts/Explorers etc
- Other useful societies such as U3A, photography/art clubs, amdram, crafting/sewing, men's' sheds – anything that can have a link to climate change, or might be a source of volunteers.
- We produced a business survey and a green audit (on excel) which we developed with a number of different businesses to help them look at their current operations and where they might be more sustainable.

ENERGY GROUP

The energy group concentrated on these key objectives:

- Information on helping people draught-proof their homes – offering a thermal imaging camera, and we trained up a number of energy champions to assist also.
- Information to help people switch to a green energy supplier
- Looking at a community energy project

They set up Test Source Community Energy and carried out feasibility studies on various local business roofs.

COMMUNICATIONS & EVENTS GROUP

- We keep our tone positive and uplifting. Guilt's not the best motivator, so we try never to make people feel bad. We also don't pretend to be perfect ourselves.
- People lead busy lives, so we try to make it easy for people to join in in whatever capacity they wish.
- We stress that people don't need to have specialist skills or knowledge to join the group, only enthusiasm. If people can't commit to huge amounts of time, or sometimes need to take a break, that's ok. It has to be sustainable in the deepest sense: that people can juggle it with their own lives over the long term.

- To prevent climate fatigue, we try to highlight good news, so that people don't feel they may as well give up. Instead of saying 'single-use plastic is awful - stop using it' we might say 'join the millions of people around the world who are committed to reducing their use of plastics.'

06. OBJECTIVES & STRATEGY

TAKING ACTION – AND BEING SEEN TO BE TAKING ACTION

We were particularly keen that we got communications out there as soon as possible, so that the village could see that we were taking action.

We then put together a calendar of events that we could run for the first year. Often, as we have now realised, people do not see all the work that goes on behind the scenes. We firstly produced an A4 black and white double-sided insert introducing ourselves, and giving some simple and mainly cost-saving hints and tips. A local brand designer created a logo for us, and a brand look and colours, so that people could start to recognise our communications. This perfectly embodied our brand values of being upbeat, positive, and contemporary, and helped people recognise our messages. We wanted to avoid sludgy green and brown colours that are often used for eco communications.

LEARNING POINT:

PICKING SOME QUICK WINS

Find one or two things that you can communicate relatively quickly, so that the residents and the group can see that things are happening.

- If things like websites and logos are going to take a long time, find ways of tackling some quick wins. This also helps motivate the group and shows that you mean business.
- Ensure you build in sufficient time for approval by the parish council and any other relevant people, and be aware of any deadlines for newsletters etc.
- A survey monkey or similar survey asking people what they think about climate change, and what they want you to do can be a useful exercise as a start point.
- Social media is excellent for minimal cost communication – but you do need to build your audience up, which takes time. See if you can piggyback on other existing channels – e.g. we have “FMOOS” – family members of Overton, What’s on in Overton, and Plastic Free Overton.

07. RAISE YOUR PROFILE

Raise your profile in your community, and engage your local leaders. You will need drive and commitment at all levels.

We spoke to everyone we knew about what we were doing, gave updates to the Parish Council in their monthly meetings, put information in the monthly newsletter, joined or registered for various organisations such as becoming Clean Air supporters, registering for SAS (Surfers Against Sewage) Plastic Free Champions programme, making sure our group was on the list for your local councils for any climate change workshops or communications. Contact other groups. Sign up for any relevant newsletters. Contact your local Borough and County Councillor, your local MP. Tell them what you are doing. See what other local groups are in your area. Attend green or eco fairs. Promote yourself through social media by being seen to be retweeting useful, relevant and clear information and articles, or ideas or events. Try to piggyback on other sites. The more you are seen to be doing things, and listening to people, the more your social media following will grow. This can be slow at first, but will build over time. Ensure you respond to any comments on your website or social media quickly and professionally. Engage any potential volunteers or helpers swiftly.

LEARNING POINT:

HAVING CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS

- Keep talking about climate change and energy initiatives to everyone you meet/know, help can come from the most unexpected places.
- Even people who are not interested in joining the group can still assist in a variety of ways.
- Use your networks, and ask all group members to use theirs.
- Even people who are not local to your parish can offer help – we had a free media report done by the generosity of a Leeds -based business due to the furlough scheme during COVID.

A good example of climate conversations paying dividends is how we came to the attention of BBC South, who were doing a piece on Carbon Footprint in Basingstoke about off-setting, and after a conversation with a friend of someone in the group, decided to link us up with the story. This was right at the start of our journey when we were unclear as to how we were going to tackle this problem. You can see the video [here](#). John Buckley at Carbon Footprint has been really helpful in sharing their carbon calculators with us, and providing valuable information.

08. IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS & BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

Who is your audience? For us it was our residents (about 5000 people), our businesses (about 300 – mainly small independent shops or businesses, many people working from home, and some industrial units, school, church. In addition, there are other larger organisations, such as Southern Cooperative, a Domino's Pizza, a Southern Water station etc.

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL(S)

Also, in the community – and of huge importance - was our Overton Primary School. The school forms a hub of learning, not just for young children, but also involves their parents, grandparents or carers, as well as the teachers themselves. Things learned here will hopefully permeate throughout their whole lives, helping to educate an entire new generation.

OTHER IMPORTANT COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We have two churches in the village and associated volunteers, as well as many clubs and societies. We have the Overton Business Association, the Overton Recreation Centre, the local clubs (Scouts, Guides, Brownies, Cubs, Explorers, Cadets etc) as well as other societies such as the Overton Biodiversity Association, local amateur dramatics, photography, U3A – there are many opportunities to spread the word. Village Agents can also be very useful contacts, as well as local landowners and farmers. Other key contacts are your Borough Councillors and County Councillors, as well as your MP.

LEARNING POINTS: SCHOOL

- We found that SAS plastic free helped the school with an Ofsted objective.
- We also found that we could help each other: our school needed help with overgrown trees (over 10 acres of grounds is expensive to look after) – not just lack of budget, but also lack of expertise in knowing what needed to be done. Luckily our tree warden was able to find the original planner and visit the school to give them a report on how to tackle this.
- They might be interested in being a recycle point: We helped them set up a TerraCycle crisp recycling point at school, with a collection rota, so that they could receive some funds from this.
- Every May they can run a walk to school campaigns. If you join forces, you can help each other with joint communications and a targeted campaign.
- They can also run no engine idling campaigns, as this is a problem outside schools.

LEARNING POINT: CHURCHES

- Churches are a key pillar as they may work with your local school, and also often have not only a great team of lovely people, but also have various charity and toddler groups, newsletters/magazines, and other communication methods (e.g. sermons, other groups, or groups who use the church rooms) to help spread the message.

- Many churches are doing the Arocha Eco Church Programme, so you may find you have common objectives. Our church has successfully completed their bronze award and are now working towards their silver. They have currently just finished running a 5 week programme of Creation Care talks and activities, and their congregation are very informed and engaged.

LEARNING POINT: BUSINESSES

Local businesses are a key part of your community, and will contribute to the overall carbon footprint of the parish in different ways. Larger businesses are likely to be very aware of this, but smaller SME's not necessarily so, as they are generally time and resource poor, so it can be hard to find time to have a sustainability discussion. We have a vibrant high street with many small businesses, and also many businesses people run from home. The challenge of each can have some similarities, but also very individual problems, requiring individual solutions. Many of our businesses are SAS plastic free champions.

We tried to do something for them e.g. take a picture of them with the poster, post it on social media, like all their posts, say thank you. This has some traction, and a few businesses are really supportive, although for others this is not on their agenda at the moment. We hope that as we progress, we can find better ways of engaging with all the businesses. It's a fine line between raising your profile and becoming an irritation.

- **Shop local:** We make sure we promote a "shop local" message in all relevant communications
- **Be fair:** promote businesses only where you can do so in a fair manner (e.g. if you have just 2 Christmas tree suppliers in the village, you can promote both of them as that is fair, and gives people useful information about local purchasing).
- **Not many locals shop locally** – they tend to use large supermarkets. According to local research, only about 6% of people shop locally (although this increased to about 20% with COVID, but then has decreased again). The focus for many people is driving a 19-mile round trip to a large supermarket and getting everything in one place, sadly.

WORKING CLOSELY WITH OTHER PARISH, TOWN, BOROUGH AND COUNTY COUNCILS

We realised that we would need to work closely with Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, work with some other local parishes (as there are opportunities to learn from each other, share resources, and not have to reinvent the wheel), Hampshire County Council, other local climate change or environmental groups.

For all aspects of Hampshire County Council's Climate Change strategy, please see [here](#), in particular the information under "What can I do" which has links to the Green Campaign (which Parish councils can use within their communities) and three other community projects that HCC are delivering under "What are we doing", community projects, working in partnerships with Hampshire residents and community groups to reduce residential carbon emissions and adapt to climate change. They have an excellent report [here](#), which has a table on page 9 showing the ease of behavioural change of various initiatives, the level of influence it has, and the opportunity size.

09. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN - INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Websites take time to set up, and we needed information to populate it, and some visuals/photos and videos. We asked all volunteers to take photos and short videos that we could use, and ensured that we captured every event.

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

At first this was very ad hoc. One issue, which I believe may be common to many parish councils, is that most of us were not very social media savvy. We had some people who used Facebook – which is one of our main communications tool, although Instagram has built up now with a younger profile audience. We had a very kind offer PR company Lucre Communications produced a brilliant report for us - link [here](#) to show how we could develop our social media strategy, including getting the right visuals and message for each channel, as they are very different. Our current social media strategy can be found [here](#). For example, Instagram is more about beautiful pictures, reels and simple stand-out messages, and for a younger audience, while X is more news -based information, and good for retweeting relevant things. We are now looking to plan out campaigns for the whole year.

PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA COVERAGE

We regularly write articles for some local publications, some local free press and local magazines, and try to send out press releases of things to all relevant media when we have something to say. We have had some success (The Guardian picked up our Overton Cup campaign, along with various radio stations).

LEARNING POINT:

SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Embrace social media** – and ideally recruit younger people: You may need to upskill yourselves or find people who are knowledgeable.
- Ensure you have people who can post relatively regularly, and schedule posts, to keep it fresh and interesting.
- Ensure you check any responses: make sure you respond to any queries quickly – these might be potential volunteers, or have useful information to give. It also makes you look professional, and efficient.
- Encourage diversity and involvement: It's worth approaching people in the community who know about certain things – e.g. if someone has made a fabulous bug hotel, why not ask them if they would make a video of it to show others how to do it. Also, then you have a different selection of people of different ages which creates more diversity and makes the website more interesting.

SOME OF OUR EARLY COMMUNICATIONS:

INITIAL LAUNCH COMMUNICATION WITH EASY HINTS AND TIPS

SUSTAINABLE OVERTON
WORKING AS A COMMUNITY TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

As the world warms, extreme weather is becoming more frequent and intense, sea levels are rising, prolonged droughts are putting pressure on food crops, and many animal and plant species are being driven to extinction. It's hard to imagine what we as individuals can do to resolve a problem of this scale and severity.

THE GOOD NEWS: WE ARE NOT ALONE!

In September, Overton Parish Council, along with Winton's Three Church and many other nearby parishes, launched a Climate Emergency Plan in a UK-wide grassroots movement by ordinary people who care about our environment. We want to stop the damage we are doing to our planet, before it's too late.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP??

We are just a bunch of ordinary people who want to make our village a better place to live. Don't worry - we're not expecting you to become a tree-hugging hippy (although there's nothing wrong with that if that's your bag!).

But everyone can make a difference - individuals, families, businesses, schools, clubs and community groups, clubs and societies. We can all help make Overton a sustainable town for us and future generations.

If you would like to live more sustainably - start by trying to **EMPOWER YOURSELF!** (see overview for some tips)

If you have ideas, expertise or just loads of enthusiasm to share, we'd love you **JOIN IN!**

If you don't have any tips at all, **PLEASE DON'T WORRY!**

TO GET IN TOUCH, SEND AN EMAIL TO ALISON ALISON.ZARECKY@OVERTONPARISHCOUNCIL.CO.UK

What will the Sustainable Overton group do?

We have 6 subgroups looking at:

- ENVIRONMENT / ENERGY / TRANSPORT / WASTE & RECYCLING / BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS, CHURCH, CLUBS & SOCIETIES / COMMUNICATIONS & EVENTS

Each group had just started meeting and drawing up plans to gain more knowledge and make Overton a more sustainable place to live. There will be a website and handbook page where you can refer things, photos, resources, ideas, as well as information and ways to get involved.

Activities being planned include a Green Fair, Repair Café in St. Mary's Back Lane, workshops and competitions. We are open to all communities and ideas - we may not get everything right at first, but what we learn we will share.

We welcome all constructive input and ideas!

USE ENERGY WISELY

87% of carbon emitted in the UK comes from energy supply. Using less energy will help the environment and save you money.

TIPS:

- Switch computers, TVs and other electronics when you're not using them
- Change to energy-efficient light bulbs
- Switch to a green energy supplier. Ideally one who provides 100% renewable electricity and gas. www.bigoverton.org is a good starting point
- Wash clothes in cold or warm water (not on a hot spin)
- Hang up your clothes when you can
- Lower your thermostat by 1 degree

CONSUME LESS= LESS WASTE

- Cut down on single-use plastics: take your own reusable cup for drinks, a reusable straw, take your own bags to the shops. Only 9% of plastic are recycled.
- Sharing, making, fixing, upcycling, and reusing are all great options to start.

'WHAT CAN I DO? I'M JUST ONE PERSON.'

-SAY 7.53 BILLION PEOPLE-

RECYCLE - IF YOU ARE UNSURE OF WHAT AND WHERE TO RECYCLE VISIT: WWW.WASTE.CO.UK/WHAT-TO-RECYCLE

EAT CAREFULLY

Don't waste food: the average UK household throws away 4470 worth of food every year. Try to plan ahead and buy only what you need, use your freezer to extend the life of the food, and get creative with using up leftovers.

- Eat more meat-free meals - meat and dairy production is a significant contributor to climate change, so just one or two meat-free meals a week will help both the environment and to change too.
- Buy local or organic whenever possible. While many spend locally, this reduces emissions as well as helping our community thrive.

MAKE YOUR COMMUTE GREEN

In the UK, transport accounts for 30% of climate-polluting emissions.

WHENEVER YOU CAN:

- Take public transport
- Ride a bike, walk or Car-share
- Switch to an electric or hybrid vehicle
- Fly less - and if you do fly, make sure you offset your emissions

What is a carbon footprint?

Your carbon footprint is the sum of all emissions of CO2 (carbon dioxide) released by your activities in a given time frame. So, when you drive a car, your engine burns fuel which creates CO2. When you heat your home with oil, gas or coal, you generate CO2. When you buy food and goods, their production also makes CO2. The higher your food has traveled, and the further you travel to buy your food, the greater the carbon footprint.

If you want to calculate your personal carbon footprint, the WWF have an easy calculator tool: www.wwf.org.uk

LET'S SLIM OUR BINS

WE CAN ALL RECYCLE MORE. BUT MANY OF US ARE CONFUSED.

On average each household puts 18kg of rubbish into the grey bin every week. (That's over half a tonne every year!) We pay a small fee for the collection and disposal through our Council Tax. And, what's worse we are throwing away scarce resources - such as metals, paper and plastics that are still usable, as well as food.

26% OF OUR GREY BIN WASTE IS AVOIDABLE FOOD WASTE.

Plugging leaks, fixing our cars, and recycling clothes, www.brookhatchwaste.com for more information.

How ELSE CAN WE RECYCLE???

Overton Hill car park: we can recycle electronic toys (games), small electronic items, mobile and landline phones, through the Green Bin for Library and Book Recycling Centre.

St. Michael's Reception shop (01203 870 000), Green, Home, Books, CD's and household items.

Group projects - such as recycling in our schools and nurseries (see the Green Bin for more information through the Green Bin for Library and Book Recycling Centre).

Trophies (e.g. orange juice packs) bring up and register in the Green Bin for Library and Book Recycling Centre at Kingswood.

Large electrical appliances, household items and old bits of furniture take to the Brookhatch Waste Recycling Centre.

The Re-paint store at the Community Partnership Office, 400-402, St. James' Street, Overton.

Green Waste - drop-off at bus or sign up to the Brookhatch Waste Recycling Centre.

WINTER @SUSTAINABLEOVERTON @SUSTAINABLEOVERTON

NO OTHER PLASTIC CURRENTLY RECYCLABLE
NO STURDY FIBRE RECYCLING TINS. NO BIRD FEEDERS ETC.

These were our first communications. We tried to keep it simple, introduce ourselves, and keep costs down by printing in black and white. This went out in our monthly newsletter hand delivered to each household. We also took it round all the businesses and tried to get it put up in their windows. Most businesses don't like doing this as a policy. Or at least have some on the tables/counter. This worked quite well in pubs. There are other options that we could explore such as the Doctors Surgery perhaps and other media.

PLASTIC FREE JULY AND PLASTIC SWAPS

PLASTIC FREE JULY

7 MILLION DISPOSABLE COFFEE CUPS
38.5 MILLION PLASTIC BOTTLES

THE 10 CHALLENGE!

We are calling on everyone in our beautiful village to try to live plastic-free for a month. We've set a target of 100% of the things we buy are wrapped in paper, or do not have any plastic at all. We are open to all communities and ideas - we may not get everything right at first, but what we learn we will share.

Plastic Free July is a global campaign launched in 2011. It's a challenge to go plastic-free for a month. We can't live without plastic, but we can reduce our plastic use.

Swap this FOR THIS:

- PLASTIC REUSABLE BOTTLE
- DISPOSABLE COFFEE CUP KEEP CUP
- PLASTIC SUCAN METAL / PAPER STRAWS
- PLASTIC BAG FABRIC TOTE BAG
- FRUIT & VEG WRAPPED IN PLASTIC LOCAL LOOSE FRUIT & VEG
- PLASTIC PACKAGING BEESWAX WRAPS
- PLASTIC MILK BOTTLE GLASS MILK BOTTLE
- SHAMPOO DISPENSERS / SHOWER GEL SHAMPOO BAR

DO YOU HAVE SOME TIPS TO HELP GO PLASTIC FREE? WE'D LOVE TO HEAR THEM!

WE'RE COMMITTED TO MAKING OUR BUSINESS MORE SUSTAINABLE

We use a green energy provider

PLASTIC FREE JULY

WE'RE COMMITTED TO MAKING OUR BUSINESS MORE SUSTAINABLE

OUR DELIVERY VAN IS ELECTRIC

PLASTIC FREE JULY

WE'RE COMMITTED TO MAKING OUR BUSINESS MORE SUSTAINABLE

REFILL YOUR SHAMPOO HERE!

PLASTIC FREE JULY

LITTER PICKS

We ran social media campaigns to recruit volunteers to do litter picks. We ran a socially distanced one too during lockdown.



GREEN CHRISTMAS

We produced this insert to give people some easy and money-saving ideas to have a greener Christmas. It's important to keep a balance between giving suggestions and allowing people to have fun (e.g. big outdoor Christmas light displays). We also ran a post each day in an advent calendar format in the run up to Christmas.

10. ONGOING EVALUATION

We nearly forgot to celebrate our first birthday (October 11th 2020) as we were so busy. It was a good point to pause and take note of all that we had achieved – as well as a few things that we had not. In a non-COVID world this would have been a team party and celebration. We settled for a zoom “pat on the pack” and motivating email.

LEARNING POINT:

Take time to celebrate!

- It's really important to make everyone feel a part of the team, and to thank people for their great work. Always take the time to do this, don't take people for granted.

SOME KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN OUR FIRST YEAR

- Setting up a plastics recycling point in conjunction with St. Mary's Church in Overton.
- 6 of us have been trained up as Hampshire County Council Food Waste Champions.
- Helped Overton Primary School undertake SAS plastic free schools campaign.
- Ran a Plastic Free July campaign, and a couple of litter picks.
- Had a virtual Green Fair – where articles, workshops, and videos were posted on our website. Post COVID we now run a Green Week every year with many activities for families.
- Conducted a Survey Monkey questionnaire, to research what residents want from us.
- 2 free tree packs from the Woodland Trust.

- Launched the Repair Café
- Became a Clean Air Day supporters, alongside our walk to school and no car idling campaigns.
- Applied for an RCEF grant for solar PV on agricultural and industrial buildings. Engaged the community – support for us owning our own community energy.

Since then we have done many things including:

- Launched the Overton Cup (for which we gained national coverage!)
- Set up the Overton and Basingstoke Nappy Library
- Launched the Overton Bag
- Became an SAS plastic free village
- Set up a FLIR thermal imaging camera hire
- Set up Test Source Community Energy - feasibility studies on local buildings for solar PV
- Put up permanent stop engine idling signs
- Community Orchard
- Community Kitchen Garden
- Overton Hill Conservation Group

Thank you for reading this – we hope you have found it of use. We hope that by sharing our learning with you, that you will find inspiration and motivation to start your own community climate change group in your parish, or reignite your current one. We are always happy to answer any questions, please contact us via our [website](#).

We wish you the very best of luck and would love to hear your learning too.

Best wishes from the whole of the SO team