

CLIMATE EMERGENCY

ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN



September 2023



1. Introduction

In July 2019, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) members unanimously declared a climate emergency. The declaration commits WBC to do as much as possible to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. Subsequently, the council published its first Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) in 2020.

The CEAP establishes 10 key priority areas and over 100 actions to mitigate CO₂ emissions and achieve this 2030 goal. The key priority areas are **Transport, Renewable Energy Generation, Building Retrofitting, Carbon Sequestration, Schools, Waste & Recycling, New Developments, Procurement, Engagement & Behaviour Change and Council Specific Actions**.

WBC recognises it cannot reach this ambitious 2030 goal alone. Alongside the successful delivery of mitigation and adaptation projects the success of the CEAP requires stakeholders including staff, residents, businesses, schools, Town and Parish Councils, partners and community organisations to engage with the CEAP and minimise their carbon footprint by shifting to more sustainable behaviours.

This engagement and communication plan will sit alongside the CEAP and will be used as a guide to work with stakeholders and share ideas, and to collaborate on communication and engagement initiatives, in a positive and inclusive way. This plan will also help us to consider and develop actions, for inclusion in the CEAP, that will have the most impact in shifting behavioural change and lasting benefits for delivering our dream for a carbon neutral Borough by 2030.

The Council faces increasing financial challenges. We will collaboratively and creatively work in partnership with our stakeholders and actively look for sources of funding such as government grant schemes to fund and assist the delivery of this plan.

2. Our dream for a Carbon Neutral Borough

In a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough, our community would breathe clean air and enjoy clean and green bio-diverse spaces. People would walk, wheel, scoot or cycle, use accessible public transport and low-emission vehicles. Homes, businesses, places of work and leisure would be low-carbon and energy efficient, powered by renewables and use innovative technologies that pave the way forward for future generations. Wokingham would be an inclusive and diverse community, where everyone plays their part in contributing towards a low-carbon future.

A dream for a carbon neutral Borough, developed following the “Dream session” of the 2022, Community Deliberative Process “Let’s Talk Climate”

3. Our Aim

Our aim is to ensure that everyone who lives, works, and studies in Wokingham Borough understands our journey to a carbon neutral future, and is equipped with the knowledge, tools and support required to make their contribution to it and to take ownership individually, as an organisation or as a community. More specifically, through this communication and engagement plan we aim:

1. To raise the profile of what we are doing as a Local Authority to reduce emissions against our ten CEAP priorities to help us achieve our carbon neutral dream for 2030.
2. To invite dialogue from our stakeholders and allow the community to constructively challenge our CEAP with our Executive and other public service providers through [The Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) and to consider other mediums such as CEAP roadshow events within the Borough and interactive e-forums.

3. To empower people to take action by supporting and incentivising residents, businesses and the wider community to make sustainable choices and pledges, including by sharing advice and best-practice examples.
4. To prioritise engagement with under-represented groups who are likely to experience the more immediate effects of climate change and to ensure policies and projects from the CEAP bring about a just transition.
5. To collaborate with partners across the Borough and other local authorities to run communication and engagement initiatives across a wider area.

In our communications and engagement work, we will strive to:

- Remain positive, showing the added value and benefit of changing behaviour and how small steps collectively can lead to a big change.
- Have a clear message to take action in driving a change in the way we live, work and travel.
- Not use 'green guilt' or environmental 'shaming' to force people to change their habits.
- Allow people to feel part of the solution, not the problem and be inspired to act and make a change.
- Listen - building good relationships and trust within the community and allowing people to share their thoughts and ideas.
- Be accessible, inclusive and represent the diverse community of Wokingham Borough including minority groups.
- Inspire and encourage residents and the wider community to make behavioural changes and share these through our communication channels.

4. Key communication and engagement messages

- WBC has an ambitious action plan to tackle the climate emergency and reduce emissions.
- We can all do our bit – together as a community we can make change happen.
- The action we take now will benefit generations to come.
- We must reduce the impact of climate change, adapt to the impacts we are already experiencing, and support nature recovery.
- Reducing the Council's and Borough's emissions and carbon footprint has wider environmental, social, health, and economic benefits.

5. Communication Channels

An online presence will be the channel for most of our communications and engagement around our CEAP. This will be the hub for information about the things the Council is doing towards carbon neutrality.

We will develop a Climate Emergency area of the website to be a hub of practical information and resources for everyone. Within this area, we will have a public facing dashboard that outlines how we are doing, achievements, case studies and progress updates. We will use social media channels, the Council's monthly Climate Emergency newsletter and other relevant newsletters and internal communication channels to spread the message.

In addition, other non-online channels will be used to reach out to the community and hard to reach groups. We will conduct or participate in existing climate change events and campaigns in the community using libraries, schools and other community hubs to bring the community together, raise awareness of the CEAP and the Council's climate work, and empower them to take action locally.

6. Our Communication and Engagement Action Plan

To help achieve our Carbon Neutral dream by 2030, we will aspire to achieve the aims formulated from the Let's Talk Climate workshops for each of the stakeholder groups below and engage with them using the listed

actions. This is not an exhaustive list and will continue to grow as projects and initiatives progress within the CEAP from now until 2030.

Residents

Our aim – For every resident to understand how their lifestyle choices impact our Borough and to play their part in contributing towards a low-carbon future in the way they live, work and travel.

- Promote the Climate Emergency Action Plan on the Council’s website, newsletters, residents’ magazine and social media channels to raise awareness on the work we are doing and the progress we are making.
- Showcase council projects and celebrate success with reference to the climate emergency.
- Use the monthly Climate Emergency newsletter and other newsletters to publicise events and share information on small steps campaigns – e.g., No Mow May, eat less meat, reuse & recycle, sustainable period products, planet pledges.
- Encourage residents to inspire others by sharing their climate actions through case studies.
- Take part and run engagement events in the community e.g., Earth Fayre, Q & A sessions and library forums.
- Run awareness campaigns around the priority areas of the CEAP e.g., active travel, reducing waste, saving energy.
- Provide information and support to residents to encourage sustainable living e.g., retrofitting homes, renewable energy and greener travel.
- Promote networks and initiatives that support the sharing economy e.g., sustainable cafes, resource libraries, repair cafes, foodbanks, clothes swaps.
- Listen to residents to understand and identify what barriers exist to living sustainably and use champions and other networks to connect people together to working towards solutions.

Businesses and organisations

Our aim – For every business and organisation to understand how to operate sustainably.

- Support and engage with businesses by highlighting the financial savings that can be obtained by reducing their carbon emissions.
- Provide toolkits and advice for businesses to use to support them in reducing their carbon footprint.
- Develop business networks to share expertise and knowledge with other businesses, for example a sustainability charter.
- Contribute to the existing monthly business newsletter with case studies and showcase of sustainable businesses.
- Encourage businesses to appoint climate change or sustainability champions and work with them to engage their staff around the CEAP and Council’s climate work.

Education

Our aim – For every school to understand how to be resilient to the impacts of climate change and educate and inspire young people to live sustainable lives.

- Run and/or participate in COP annual events and Teacher Forums for schools’ engagement.
- Work with our Youth Council – to get young people linked together to share sustainable ideas to help their schools.
- Work with schools to raise awareness of the government’s [Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy for Education](#) which sets out a new curriculum and will require all education settings to have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan by 2025.
- Create an eco-school’s initiative for sustainable schools.

- Provide work experience opportunities for students to learn about the work the Climate Emergency team and the Council do.
- Include articles and events on Climate Emergency within the education newsletter.

Wokingham Borough Council staff & partners

Our aim – Lead by example, champion the CEAP internally and in conversations with our partners

- Raise awareness of the CEAP through roadshow presentations within the Council for staff to understand how it embeds in each area of the organisation.
- Work with other Local Authorities and partners to share knowledge and identify successful campaigns and events.
- Collaboratively work with Town & Parish councils and partners to help engage communities around the Wokingham Borough's climate goal.
- Promote regular Climate Emergency updates using The Big Chat, Central Download newsletter and the intranet as part of an internal behavioural change program focused on reducing our carbon impact while working in the office and home.
- Continue to expand and give a voice to Net Zero Heroes – WBC's sustainability champions helping to support behavioural change within the organisation.
- Improve induction on CE for new staff by introducing a new e-learning module and develop a wider training programme for all staff.
- Promote staff volunteering opportunities that help reduce our carbon footprint and environmental impact e.g., litter picks, clean waterways etc.

7. Barriers and Challenges

There already exists a barrier for some to accept that climate change has been driven by human activities and that as a community we need to work together to avert the future risks associated with a changing climate. Additionally, people may not be clear about what causes climate change and may not currently consider climate change when making everyday decisions. This is not because they don't care, but because they do not understand the wider implications of their actions; from what they wear, eat, how they travel and power their homes.

A barrier to making effective change is that many of the actions that people can take to reduce their carbon footprint requires significant levels of investment. Whether it be changing how their premises or homes are heated to moving to electric vehicles, these big changes in lifestyle often require substantial financial outlay with long pay-back periods. Not everyone will be in a financial position to make these changes and as an authority we have a duty to communicate the small changes individuals can collectively make without huge associated costs.

It is also important to recognise that not everybody will want, or have the capacity, to be involved more deeply in climate action. The challenge is to understand what the drivers are to engage people in the climate change debate, to break down some of these barriers that exist and to connect people together to working towards solutions. How and what we communicate is key to driving societal change and not just by simply listing the facts. It is focussing on what matters to people as individuals and adapting our messaging accordingly through the listening process.

It is, therefore, important that the messaging for individual projects within the CEAP should recognise this too with the aim that all residents and businesses will have some level of engagement, either directly or indirectly, in the climate change agenda.

8. Evaluation of success

Communication and engagement evaluation is important for allowing us to understand if the actions we have delivered have had the desired impact within the community. We will aim to evaluate success of key actions by considering:

- **Reach and traffic** - how widely has our message been conveyed. e.g., data analysis from large campaigns, the number of subscribers to our Climate Emergency newsletter, website visits and clicks, social media engagement (likes and shares) event attendance and general enquiries (emails) from the community.
- **Engagement** - what sort of interaction has transpired as a result of our communications, was our message understood, what stakeholders did we target? Have we managed to engage our hard-to-reach groups? **This** may be through surveys, feedback questionnaires after events and workshops with particular stakeholder networks.
- **Lessons learned** – was our action and approach successful, what could we do differently next time?

We will through the CEAP communications monitoring group and with the communications lead officer continually look at different ways to monitor and evaluate our engagement and communications across the Borough. Additionally, we will use and analyse any data collected from previous campaigns, articles and events to inform our decision making for future engagement and communications.

By regular evaluation we hope to identify what actions of Climate Emergency members of our community are engaged in, what they are most interested in and what their concerns are. This will help us to better understand what future actions are needed and how we can provide meaningful support and services to them to work towards carbon neutrality.

9. Reporting on progress

By working in the open, we will communicate WBC's commitment for a carbon neutral Borough by 2030 and honestly report the actions we are taking and progress against these. We will in addition publish an annual progress update within the annual CEAP progress report against Priority 9.

To meet carbon neutrality by 2030 we need rapid, far-reaching change across our Borough. Working at pace, in an area where policy, research and technology are constantly evolving will mean there are things we try that do not work. We will share these challenges and lessons learnt, whilst celebrating our successes, to maintain an open dialogue with our community and partners and support a collective, Borough-wide response to the climate and ecological crisis.

Effectively engaging with the community and changing behaviours in a positive way will make people feel empowered and invested in the climate issues that we face; consequently, seeing themselves as being part of the solution, not just part of the problem will help us to work towards achieving our dream to become a Carbon Neutral Borough by 2030.