

Market Harbourough Climate Action Group

(a part of [Sustainable Harbourough Community](#) – an unincorporated not-for-profit Association)



Response to Harbourough District Council's Climate Action Survey Questionnaire

1. Introduction

As recent disastrous weather events demonstrate - most recently in Canada, the USA, Germany, Belgium, China and closer to home in London and Peterborough – climate breakdown is accelerating and bringing with it rapidly growing threats to populations across the globe. As a group, we believe that the present collective response from governments, organizations and individuals is inadequate regarding reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other harmful emissions – **it will not avert further catastrophic effects caused by climate change.**

It is encouraging that Harbourough District Council (HDC) has acknowledged the emergency, is beginning to plan a response and has sought to engage residents in discussion through a survey questionnaire. We realize these plans are still at the consultation stage and that the issues raised by the need to respond to climate change are often complex and involve considering diverse and sometimes competing interests.

However, HDC's statement accompanying the survey **should be stronger** regarding HDC's role in developing strategy, giving leadership and taking action – it needs to be more specific and ambitious in its policy goals and clearer as to how they will be achieved. The statement is too inward-looking, which is a limitation - given that to be successful, any local response to the climate emergency must be reliant on support from other layers of government, local and national.

With these points in mind, we make the following comments and suggestions under **three main headings**:

- Strategy, Leadership and Vision;
- Strategic Partners; and
- Practical Steps Towards Zero Carbon.

2. Strategy, Leadership and Vision

Political and Corporate leadership should be about **creating a shared vision, building climate change mitigation into all aspects of policy and behaviour, and showing authoritative commitment to managing climate change** - for your employees, partners and the wider public. Also working with national government and other local government bodies to tackle the issues that go beyond the local boundaries - the overriding aim must be **'to keep fossil fuels underground'**, thereby preventing climate change and polluting chemicals entering our environment.

Therefore, **we would like to see HDC:**

- Adopt a much more ambitious approach than it has so far, with some really stretching planned actions involving measurable target outcomes for CO2 reduction, and schemes for monitoring progress and assessing outcomes. As just one example, stop referring so often to 'low carbon', which is not defined in any way, and **make 'zero carbon' the goal of local strategy**. Presumably, although you don't mention it, you will **set targets** for continued reduction of all carbon emissions and measure progress against them. It is important that we all understand how you will be tackling the gap between what you are currently achieving and getting to the end target of net zero.
- Develop a vision of what a 'zero carbon' district would look like if the plan is successful and communicate it in **clear, simple terms**. Many members of the community are not aware of the Council's strategy to tackle climate change, so a **marketing initiative is required** to make sure the information is easily available to the wider community.
- Broaden the scope of strategy and action. HDC has committed to 'managing its own assets and services with the aim of reducing carbon emission to net zero by 2030, *as far as practical*.' As well as the goal being expressed too timidly, this approach is too limited and HDC needs to recognise that it **has a huge influence** over such things as new private housing developments, schools, hospitals, community groups, leisure facilities etc. HDC needs to find ways of **supporting, challenging and measuring** their behaviour regarding climate change, with support from national government.
- Identify and communicate the **positive impact** of a successful climate change strategy on local employment and jobs. Some existing jobs may be at risk but there is a **huge opportunity** for creating a whole range of new and exciting job opportunities.
- Revisit the Local Plan and **put climate change strategy at its heart**. Climate change is an existential threat and our need to respond should drive all aspects of HDC policy and practice.
- Examine the **fairness issues** raised by planned policies for responding to climate change. How should the costs and burdens of adjustment be shared along with the benefits?

3. Strategic Partners

The Climate Change Committee has stated in their [Sixth Carbon Budget that UK councils can play a major role](#) in reducing CO2 emissions in their areas. It has also observed that this is partly because the public generally have more faith in their local council than they do in central government. Local councils, therefore, can play a **crucial role in mobilising public support for the move to zero carbon**. However, the Committee also states that if councils are to succeed, they will require more support from national government. As a group we would like to know more about how HDC is working with Leicestershire County Council and other local authorities to coordinate communication with national government (eg via the [LGA Climate Change Hub](#)) - as well as actions on climate change in the East Midlands.

We would also like to see HDC:

- Link up with UK100 and its campaign to ensure that [local councils are supported with sufficient investment](#), e.g. from the UK Infrastructure Bank and with enhanced regulatory powers which will enable them to reduce CO2 emissions and meet the requirements of the [Climate Change Act](#)
- Lobby MPs to get their support for local initiatives to reduce emissions and enhance resilience to climate change. It would be good if HDC could generate wider public awareness and discussion of its vision for Harborough District to generate support and a political base from which to engage with local MPs.
- Show more evidence of strategic leadership in its work with parishes and communities, for example by ensuring that CO2 reduction is central to all neighbourhood plans, providing support for neighbourhood actions to cut CO2 emissions in line with their plans, and by monitoring their performance and holding them to account.
- Work with bodies that can offer advice and guidance on climate change initiatives such as Carbon Trust, The UK Green Building Council. HDC should also be communicating their commitment to work with local businesses, community groups, and schools to help them take action and monitor results.
- Work closely with local business to encourage greater awareness of and commitment to reducing CO2 emissions, e.g. by switching to green energy suppliers, improving their supply chain management to help reduce transport emissions. Courses could be provided on supply chain management and the use of relevant software to manage this. In support of this, HDC could facilitate the provision of workshops and training courses for SMEs in particular. Market Harborough has an Innovation Centre but it does not appear currently to run any courses related to climate change.
- Work closely with the agricultural community, encouraging a reassessment of land use patterns (in line with the new [Environmental Land Management Scheme](#)) and the scope for more sustainable farming methods and alternative uses for land such as tree planting and rewilding / renaturing (including the [Soil Association's Climate in Crisis](#) work).
- Setup a local citizen's forum for young people to be involved, to hear their voice and support mutually agreed actions to tackle the impact of climate change and help deliver the HDC Plan

4. Practical steps towards zero carbon emissions

In outlining its commitment to tackling the climate emergency, HDC has focused on the need to improve the energy efficiency of both its own and other buildings, move towards sustainable transport and take measures to mitigate the effects of climate change and improve community resilience to them.

In committing itself to **providing leadership in these areas, HDC should:**

- Do more to raise awareness of the urgent need to reduce CO₂ and CH₄ (methane) emissions and how to achieve it. There is much helpful advice for individuals and businesses on the HDC website. Is usage of the site measured to assess its impact? How widely and heavily has it been used? Are residents and local businesses and other organizations sufficiently aware of it? If not, thought needs to be given to how more people can be made aware of the site and how to use it. Similarly, how many people have responded to HDC's climate consultation questionnaire and what has been the quality of responses? Answering these questions should give an **idea of how much more needs to be done** in terms of raising public awareness of the climate crisis and support for a move to Zero carbon.
- Lead by example. If it has not already done so, the council should undertake a review of the energy efficiency of its buildings. If not already using green energy suppliers, they should make this switch. Does the council have a plan for moving all its buildings to a renewable energy source? Does the council know the carbon footprint of its own vehicles? HDC should be looking to lower its carbon footprint by moving to electric and low emissions vehicles.
- Practical steps must include taking every opportunity to legislate and ensure that new and upgrading developments include the very best standards and applications for energy efficiency, on site energy generation with renewable energy (especially solar heat and electricity on buildings and other renewables, especially biofuels, in local agriculture). Rainwater collection for flushing toilets, cleaning and gardens should be mandatory. Orientation of buildings with respect to solar heating is vital. Provision of allotments at housing developments of more than, say, 10 houses should be mandatory.
- Ensure that developers comply with the highest standards of energy efficiency and climate change resilience in building design. HDC refers to [Passivhaus](#) and [BREEAM](#) standards in its Local Plan and has outlined specific requirements for enhancing resilience. Developers should be required to meet the highest of these standards and requirements. To what extent are current building developments in the Harborough District conforming to them?
- Encourage local businesses to examine their own emissions performance and **move towards zero emissions**. Evidence that they are making efforts and monitoring results should be assessed when considering procurement decisions by HDC and the evaluation of tenders submitted by local businesses to HDC. On procurement more generally, HDC should seek to buy only from businesses that conform to the highest environmental standards and can show that they are working actively to reduce their CO₂ emissions.
- Be prepared to look seriously at the **difficult and possibly unpopular decisions** that will have to be made in moving to sustainable transport and the elimination of vehicle emissions. Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in the district is poor. Regarding home charging, how will this be

possible for those without off-street parking and those living in rented accommodation? Given that complete transition to EVs will take decades, how can use of conventional vehicles be reduced in the meantime? Consideration needs to be given to limiting or discouraging the use of private vehicles in town centres. This could be helped by re-imagining public transport so that it is more flexible in meeting users' needs but this requires investment and must be considered in relation to the strategic issues in section 2 above. Cycling and walking can be encouraged but this too requires resources to be invested in making cyclists in particular **feel safer on the roads**, not only in and around town centres but on country roads.

5. In conclusion

Our response to HDC's climate emergency statement and questionnaire is driven by our conviction that only **coordinated, committed action at all levels** of government will succeed in inducing the behavioural changes required of business, organizations in general, and private individuals. As a group, we are eager to talk with HDC councillors and officers about how we can support HDC in its efforts to take such action in the interests of Harborough District and its people.

Our response has also been kept **relatively brief, and focussed** on what we hope are broad areas of strategy and leadership. In the course of our discussions, research and reading over the last few months, we have seen **many examples of specific actions** that are being planned by other councils, some of which may well be possible to take up in the Harborough District. We are planning to put some of these together in a separate document, which we aim to get to you in the next few weeks, and feel it will be of use to you.

We are very interested to understand **what HDC plans to do after the end of July** in relation to the production of the final version of its Climate Emergency Action Plan.

- What are your anticipated timescales for publication?
- How do you plan to ensure continued participation from residents and interested groups before it is finalised?
- How will you ensure that all departments within the council are actively engaged in the discussion and are fully aware of the changes they will need to make in the way they work?

In particular, we would urge you to ensure that the **interests and concerns of young people** are taken into account, as they will have to live the longest with its consequences. We would also urge you to ensure that the voices of **all geographical parts of the district** are represented, and all levels of society – it is often the poorest and most vulnerable people who are least able to respond to climate emergency issues without assistance and support.

To this end, maybe you could **broaden the membership of the Climate Action Working Group** to include representatives from key groups, or even consider setting up some sort of **'Citizens Assembly'** which has been used very successfully by other councils.

However you do it, we feel it is vital that you encourage representation from a broad base of residents, businesses, community groups if you are to succeed in what we realise is a huge and complicated task.

We are able to play an active role in this and have key communication channels in place to assist HDC.