

## OCTOBER – COMMUNITY

In most previous articles we have dealt with specific elements of human consumption that affect our planet and what we can do to mitigate our impact. This time we consider the benefits of acting collectively to make the changes needed for a more sustainable future.

Facing up to the climate and biodiversity crises as an individual can be really tough. As hopefully this series of articles has highlighted, there are lots of actions we can all take that will make a difference to our own footprint. However at times it can seem futile acting alone and we all need to be aware of the potential for unhealthy levels of eco-anxiety. Acting together achieves more and can make us feel better. As the old African proverb puts it;

‘If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.’

### **So what do we mean by community?**

For the purposes of sustainable action, community can be whatever group can make a difference. It can be a small group of households or friends; it can be a street or whole village or even a district. It can be based on a club or society, a church, school or Parish Council, a business or a pub or even a Facebook group.

Community came to the fore during Covid with people standing at their doors to applaud the NHS, and neighbours helping each other out with collecting food, prescriptions and other essentials. However, Covid also seems to have weakened our communities in some respects, with some people going out less due to nervousness or because old habits have been broken.

### **What can Communities Achieve?**

Communities have always flourished on the back of common purpose and surely working together against the climate and nature crises offer a great opportunity for enhancing the spirit within our villages.

A collective is much better placed to undertake a whole range of initiatives. Combined muscle power can help deliver conservation projects from tree planting to pond creation. Arrangements can be made to share resources ranging from car clubs and lift-sharing to tool-sharing and the passing on of surplus items. A group is much better placed to get grants (Bristol Community Climate Action Project has just won a £2.48 million grant from the National Lottery’s Climate Action Fund) and can also leverage their influence by lobbying politicians, businesses, and other organisations. But often the power of community is just in its provision of mutual support, encouragement, and fellowship.

Let’s look at a few types of groups and how they can play a part.



‘Many hands make light work’

## Churches

These articles arose from discussions within the By Brook Benefice and requests for greater knowledge of the issues involved with sustainability. These conversations were prompted by the work done at St Andrews, Castle Combe which resulted in the award of the first Silver Eco-church Award in the Bristol Benefice. We had to look across five categories-Worship and Teaching, Buildings, Land (churchyard), Community and Global Engagement and Lifestyle and make improvements across each of them.

There are nine other churches in the Benefice, many of which are keen to enhance their sustainability and gain an Eco-church award. Unfortunately our churches are under pressure with lots to do and few resources, so they really could do with some help. Anyone interested in helping your village church (whether you ever go or not) gain an Eco-church award, please do make contact.

## Parish Councils

The minutes of our PC's show that some of them do have a focus on sustainable action. North Wraxall perhaps lead the way with their Parish Environmental Plan. It would be great if we could see others doing the same, along with plenty of collaboration between Parishes. Our PC's are also short of resource with the same few people carrying the burden; again we need more people helping out.



As an aside, hopefully we can also see an end to Parish Council requests to the Parish Steward to come armed with his weedkiller!

## Local Nature Organisations

Our main one is of course The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Their volunteering programme provides plenty of opportunities for group working, but unfortunately, they don't have any reserves in the By Brook area with the closest being Vincients Wood on the edge of Chippenham.

'Could electric car clubs work in By Brook?'

## Environmental and Campaigning Organisations

The Wiltshire Climate Alliance [www.wiltshireclimatealliance.org.uk](http://www.wiltshireclimatealliance.org.uk) is an umbrella organisation for 23 groups across the county, including Chippenham and Corsham. Their vision is a climate and nature friendly, net zero carbon and ecologically sustainable Wiltshire by 2030. They have nine different topic groups and have a strong focus on helping Wiltshire County Council to deliver on their pledge to make Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030. They meet regularly on-line (anyone can join) and the website is full of useful information.

## On-line Groups

Many of us belong to a local Facebook or WhatsApp group. These can play a great part in bringing people together and enabling sustainable actions.

## What can we do now?

Can you offer help to one of our existing organisations, whether a church, Parish Council or other, to help them in their sustainability journey? Do you belong to an organisation or club that needs an action plan to become more planet friendly? Can you suggest or instigate action through your on-line community?

Finally is there any appetite for a new entity to drive action across By Brook?

**Next month's edition is all about the Stuff we buy-or perhaps shouldn't!** Get in touch at [mike@vertigosdc.com](mailto:mike@vertigosdc.com)

MIKE ROBERTS