

Appendix A

Background information on Marlow Town Council's Sustainability and Environmental commitment

Last year the Town Council (TC) set up its Environment Advisory Group and launched **#sustainablemarlow** under the Planning, Environment and Transportation committee (PET). Based on input from this group, which includes two local environmental specialists, the TC publicly committed to making Marlow 'an environmental exemplar town'.

There is though much work to be done here and the Town Council doesn't have the appropriate expertise for the work that is required - hence the proposal to buy in some expertise for a short period of time to help the TC raise its game. Once we are through Covid the world will be engaging more in the environment and how we can help it. At the same time we must ensure we remain a vibrant riverside town that continues to attract residents and visitors alike.

Our Environment Policy was approved by the PET committee in 2019. Drafting a strategy is the logical next step to give depth to the policy. We issued our Climate Change statement and our Clean Air Plan in May with next steps that need to be undertaken on each. We also need to broaden out into other areas, including active transport (though limited by being a Victorian Town) which is a Government and Buckinghamshire Council initiative, working with our surrounding parish councils by building a supportive policy network and showing leadership with the various environment groups around the town.

As well as delivering on our policy and liaising with these other groups, we need to engage with local businesses and key partners such as Globe Park BidCo and the Chamber of Trade and Commerce.

Community engagement is really important; we need to educate our residents in how they can help and what they can do to make a difference. We've seen, through the discussions around Covid, how difficult it can be. We need to make it easy for residents to get on board, encourage them to measure their own carbon footprint, make information available on such things as solar panels, electric heating pumps, electric cars and many more. In addition, we should help to promote the protection of our wild life, encourage tree planting etc. We could also build upon the excellent work done locally by looking into the potential to explore things like Create Streets, a community engagement tool.

We have successfully kicked off a number of TC-supported projects run and managed by sustainablemarlow, for example:-

The Marlow environmental performance index – a starting point for environmental action is to have a strong understanding of current environmental and sustainability factors and to be able to track progress over time. Based on the same approach as national environmental accounts, the town council is aiming for Marlow to become the first small town in the UK to create its own simplified environmental performance index. Year by year the index will track trends in important indicators, including air quality, the CO2 emissions rating of cars registered in Marlow, the share of Marlow's municipal waste recycled, and the number of

street trees in Marlow. Here is a link to the work we have completed so far
[file:///C:/Users/Jocelyn/Downloads/Marlow%20envl%20perf%20index%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Jocelyn/Downloads/Marlow%20envl%20perf%20index%20(1).pdf)

Tackling nitrogen dioxide air pollution - Marlow town centre (the A4155 Chapel St, Spittal Street and West Street) was declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2017 after monitoring showed illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution. Working with the then Wycombe District Council and now Buckinghamshire Council, the town council is taking actions of its own and strongly promoting wider changes to bring NO₂ levels back within the legal limit as soon as possible. Actions include signage to raise driver awareness of the AQMA, and encouraging smoother driving behaviour, and discouraging engine-idling when stopped. MTC is lobbying higher government tiers to take further actions here.

MTC's Carbon Audit – Cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero is widely acknowledged as the existential issue of our age. Every business and every resident will be affected by a wave of change, including the TC. As a first step we need to learn about our own emissions - how big are they and where do they come from? For this reason the TC has commissioned a comprehensive carbon audit, the results of which are expected soon. This carbon footprint study will enable the TC to demonstrate to the town that it takes climate change seriously, and will also provide a baseline for actions that the town council could take in future to reduce its own emissions. We will encourage households to measure their own carbon emissions, so they become aware of what they can do to help reduce them.

Marlow eco-schools initiative – sustainablemarlow is working with all Marlow schools to identify and share good environmental practices. The team audited school activities, progress and plans in the summer of 2019 and, through discussion with the head teachers, identified and shared good practice. Out of those discussions came the idea of holding a conference to bring pupils from 13 local schools together. We were expecting around 130 children to be at the event on 26 March 2020 and had planned to use the opportunity to encourage collaborative action. We also had a number of local and national organisations supporting the event, which due to Covid-19 sadly had to be cancelled. Schools are somewhat behind with their curriculum so a remote/virtual conference is not currently on the agenda, but as soon as it can this event will take place.

Refill Marlow - Eliminating single-use plastic bottles, the council took action to help visitors to the town centre avoid having to use single-use plastic bottles. A new public drinking water fountain has been installed on The Causeway, with two already in Higginson Park and a further one has just opened at the United Reformed Church on Oxford Road. We are currently talking to other interested bodies to install another water refill station in the Spittal Street area.

The environmental advisory group registered the town with the national “Refill” campaign last year (run by City to Sea, a community interest company) and launched a local scheme to encourage local restaurants and cafes to sign up to providing free tap water refills. Given the Covid pandemic this initiative is currently on hold. The initiative was set up to help residents and visitors alike to buy fewer single-use plastic bottles.

Food – sustainablemarlow has also signed up to the Plastic Free Communities initiative, encouraging food sharing. According to the waste expert group WRAP, one-third of food world-wide ends up being wasted, and food waste contributes 7% of global greenhouse gas

emissions. The council is encouraging greater food sharing in Marlow via the Olio app and encouraging donations to the One Can Trust.

ReLeaf – The TC has a priority to increase the number of trees in and around Marlow. Trees are an essential part of a healthy environment, support wildlife, and absorb carbon dioxide from the air, helping to limit climate change. Marlow has good tree numbers in certain streets, but there is a lot of scope to increase the numbers of street trees, and there are many hedgerows in the countryside around Marlow that are treeless. The council will work with partners to increase the number of trees in and around Marlow. Last year TTM replaced the damaged trees in Seymour Park.

Re-Wilding – To be mindful of our wildlife we selected four verge areas around Marlow last year to be left unmown for wildflower planting, with a further two areas agreed for the coming year. We also agreed with the then Wycombe District Council to leave two areas, one in Higginson Park and the other in Rookery Park to be unmown for wildflower planting, which the hedgehogs were very happy about. This was a pilot scheme and Buckinghamshire Council have agreed we can continue it in the coming year.

Waterways – We have worked closely with the Angling Association in partnership with the EA and Thames Water to improve the Higginson Park backwater, establishing a much better flow, and providing a safe haven for fish spawning and for swans to amble among the reeds. The initial stages of this work have now been completed. (The owners of Stoneware on the opposite bank have also agreed to tidy their area.)

The Marlow Wombles – the TC are very supportive of this local initiative and have helped by providing litter pickers, and waste bags that the Town Council will dispose of. Litter has been a growing problem especially during this pandemic with many abandoned disposable masks. The Brownies have offered to produce posters to remind residents and visitors not to drop their litter, but to take it home with them.

Next Steps – We are making great headway with many other initiatives with some already in the pipeline. We now need to set up systems and networks to keep the actions mentioned above running and developing to the next stage. We have been very busy so far, but there is more to do, hence the need for some professional help to move us to the next stage.

When the Country comes out of Covid the Environment will be a big topic for everyone. Indeed it has already started and we need to get ourselves at the right place to continue. We have achieved a lot in the last year, but we really need to increase the effort. This is the reason why it is essential to secure some freelance help to get us in a position where the increasing work levels can be streamlined and managed to get us to the next stage. Policies and procedures need to be introduced to keep us moving forward.

This whole initiative can be funded from our share of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Cllr Jocelyn Towns
1 December 2020