

Consultant's proposal for a TC community engagement programme on sustainability

June 2021

Three drivers:

- The TC wants to deepen its engagement in sustainability issues and to be seen to be doing so.
- Councillors have cited the importance of educating residents on sustainability issues.
- Local environmental groups are demanding a say on sustainability issues.

This proposal responds to all three drivers. The suggested approach builds on the vision sketched at the 18 March 2021 online public consultation.

Key points on implementation:

- I propose using the name Sustainable Marlow, which the TC already “owns” and is an excellent brand for the purpose. SM can still remain the TC’s overall sustainability brand with the new bit being the SM Community Engagement Programme.
- The entire focus of the programme should be on pro-sustainability behaviour changes by people - about the community itself, not about TC (or Bucks) environmental policies or actions, important though those will remain.
- Delivering the programme in partnership with local green groups will multiply its potential reach and effectiveness many times over by increasing the number of voices, growing the number of communication channels and expanding overall resources.
- A mechanism should be created that enables groups to be (and to feel) involved and to have real influence. The TC will not be able to control all aspects and must consider itself as conductor of an orchestra.
- I suggest creating a “Sustainable Marlow steering group” or similar, chaired by a councillor, bringing together interested residents (in practice local green groups) and charged with designing and delivering the community engagement programme. The aim should be to harness and embrace groups’ enthusiasm as far as possible.
- Most local sustainability or net zero community action plans adopted elsewhere seem to be comprehensive, long-term, and massively over-engineered compared with the powers of local government. I recommend NOT taking this approach, but instead setting just a few objectives that are practically implementable in the near term, that can be simply communicated and that can have clear local identity.

- Overarching goals, if they are adopted, should be few and broad. I suggested six possibilities at the March public consultation, which I believe reflect particular local concerns as well as the big global issues. These were as follows:

Draft goals

- Net zero carbon emissions
 - Good air quality
 - Plentiful green & active transport
 - Healthy biodiverse habitats
 - High eco-efficiency and low waste
 - A thriving community and town centre
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- The initial focus of the SM steering group should be on principles, and then behaviour change goals to target through the programme. Participating green groups would be encouraged to nominate goals that reflect their particular priorities.
 - I propose that only a limited number of behaviour change goals should be set. Certainly no more than 10. I believe that in terms of overall success “less is more”: having too many actions will dilute the message and undermine local identity.
 - Results from the proposed sustainability survey of Marlow residents should give residents a voice in selection of behaviour change goals too, alongside the TC and participating green groups
 - Once behaviour change goals have been agreed then programme delivery will be all about engagement and communications.
 - Engagement means building new networks of residents who are actually making pro-sustainability behaviour changes. This will make the programme as far as possible an organic, bottom-up movement. It will also enable communications to be about the community, not just to the community, based on the principle of “show, don’t tell”. Potential examples include “clubs” of electric car owners, or food sharers, or walk-to-schoolers etc.
 - The overall goal of the communications effort should be to positively influence behaviours by informing, educating, encouraging and inspiring.
 - Communications should be sustained, and delivered by all partners in the programme, with the TC providing the overview through all its communication channels, including social media, the TC website, The Marlovian magazine, and press releases to media.
 - Following an initial invitation to interested residents the steering group should meet more regularly for an initial period (perhaps monthly for three months) while the programme is

established. Once the programme is up and running meetings could then become less frequent, perhaps quarterly.

- Review of the behaviour change goals should be reviewed at least annually and perhaps six-monthly. Over time, addition of new goals and/or retirement of old ones or ones that didn't resonate with the community could refresh the programme and provide new impetus.
- The work of the SM steering group would presumably be overseen by the TC Environment & Sustainability Committee, which would pass any important developments or decisions to the full council as necessary.