



Alton Climate Action & Network Group Updates – Feb 2020

Contents:

News from the groups:

- AVLAN
- Energy Alton
- Building Standards
- Transport
- Food (Community Cupboard)
- Repair Café
- Lobbying
- Outreach

AVLAN

AVLAN are happy to announce they are now in a position to take over a couple of plots of land and plant them up with flowers, hedges and trees to increase biodiversity and particularly to attract pollinators which are in decline. Do come along to the AVLAN meeting on Thursday 20th Feb to find out more.

Philippa met with Leah Coney who announced that she is running out of places to plant trees. Do ask for advice if you would like to plant trees, hedges or pollinator attracting flowers in your garden. Every little helps.

Lesley has negotiated with All Saints (Eco) Church for a wildlife friendly garden to be created in front of church in conjunction with Gilbert White's gardener.



Riversearch training is scheduled by Glen Skelton at Alton Community Centre on Saturday 7th March, AVLAN volunteers and Flood Meadows maintenance team welcome.

Councillor Ginny Boxall has given a £500 grant for tools and plants which has been very gratefully received.

Energy Alton

Breaking news from Energy Alton is that they hope to start working with Councillor Russell Oppenheimer of the EHDC climate panel on a community energy project.

Watch this space!!

Building Standards

Tony Cohen has completed the Herculean task of responding to the consultation document on the government's future homes standard. He has replied to 68 questions in the review sent on behalf of The Alton Society and Energy Alton. Some councils have been insisting on higher standards in contravention of government guidelines. (not EHDC). We are fighting a very powerful lobby from 5 major house building companies to stick to business as usual. Time to lobby our MP.

The next consultation will be on retrofitting existing buildings.



▲ Ditch the developer ... Norwich set up its own housebuilding company to create Goldsmith Street homes. Photograph: Tim Crocker



We would like to organise visits to passive and very low energy houses to give people a better idea of the options available.

Transport

Charlotte Wigzell, Chris Chappell and Janice Montgomery have been in talks with Cycle Basingstoke and Cycle Winchester who are keen to set up a Cycle Hampshire umbrella group to gain a stronger voice with Hampshire County Council. They plan to hold a cycling forum this spring and we are hoping to have some input into that.

Janice wants to set up Cycle Alton as an umbrella group for the several cycling groups that already exist in Alton to act as a voice for all cyclists in Alton to lobby local government at all levels. Keep a look out for their meetings at the hub in the future.



In the meantime please fill in the EHDC survey on cycling and walking infrastructure
<https://www.easthants.gov.uk/news/are-we-right-path-active-travel>

Food

Penney Hames, Sandy Marks and their wonderful team of volunteers have done sterling work launching the Community Cupboard and now also the Community Fridge in the Alton Community Centre. This too has been a great success bringing in donations from individuals as well as supermarkets and attracting many more users. They now have 900 followers on Facebook. It is quite a labour intensive project but everyone seems to enjoy being involved.

The next plan is to set up a Community Café at Wooteys Infants School for 5 weeks during the summer holidays. Penney has discovered a warehouse which holds a more reliable range of items that they sell for a minimal amount and this would allow volunteers to cook healthy lunches for families for a modest cost. Again Councillor Ginny Boxall has pledged some money to help this project get off the ground.



Repair Café

The repair café continues to draw the crowds every second Saturday of the month and is now looking to expand the dates they can offer – taking advantage of the new Community Hub.

Watch this space!!

Lobbying

You may have noticed Damian Hinds singing our praises in The Herald last week. It is good to see him state that “Tackling climate change is a defining challenge of our age.” The lobbying group will continue pressing him to think big and bold in planning mitigation and adaptation to the climate crisis.

Our Hampshire County Councillors continue to prove elusive, but we will try again to set up meetings with them and with Jan Warwick the HCC Climate Champion.

On 11th February 3 members of the ACAN committee attended the East Hampshire District Council’s (EHDC) Let’s Talk session on the climate and environmental crisis and what they can and should be doing about it. It was a well attended meeting and covered a lot of ground but we came away feeling that many of the councillors still do not grasp the urgency of the situation. We will be keeping up the pressure here too.



We consider ourselves very lucky that Alton’s town clerk and many of the town council are well on board with the need to act on climate change and we continue to work well with the climate panel and in plans for the Alton Eco Fair on July 12th.

Outreach

It has been gratifying to find so many other organisations and individuals citing ACAN and our successes as examples to follow. We have had several fledgling groups in other parts of Hampshire approach us asking for advice and speakers and we have been happy to oblige.

Indeed our progress has been substantial as can be seen in the summary of ACAN's achievements in the 9 months since our inception as set out by James Willis – see the newsletters page on our website for the full document.

Hopefully some of you will also have noticed the first of our fortnightly columns in The Herald. These are supplied by Philippa Brealey, Sheila John and Sonia Davey. Please feel free to send in articles of your own of around 400 words on your own pet topics for consideration.

And we are continuing with our 4 weekly slots on Wey Valley Radio on Thursday mornings at 10am with David Way. The next one on Thursday 5th March do listen out if you can. ACAN members have also been invited to do a pre-recorded interview with Sarah Dell for her Sunday night show on 15th March.

Coming soon we will be featuring again with editorial and a banner on the next Herald Green Insert which will focus on the Community Hub and the Eco Fair.

It is humbling to work with so many devoted, committed people getting so much done to make Alton a better and more climate aware place. Thank you all.



ALTON CLIMATE ACTION & NETWORK

Damage to our wildlife can never be reversed...

ACAN was extremely dismayed to learn of the destruction of what remained of 85 metres of mature native hedgerow in Medstead – parts of which dated back to the middle of the last century.

HCC has declared a climate emergency yet seems content to increase our carbon footprint by destroying hundreds of carbon-capturing plants, as well as ignoring the needs of the many wildlife species that depended on it.

Some of the creatures in question are rare, endangered and even protected. One example is the hazel dormouse – which is vulnerable to extinction and listed in S5 Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. A survey should have been carried out during the dormouse's breeding season and, unless absence was confirmed, a mitigation licence should have been obtained from Rural England before any work was carried out.

...to ignore specialist advice is, in our mind, not only dangerous, it is immoral.

What some might not realise is the hazel dormouse is sparsely populated and relies on miles of continuous hedgerows to thrive.

When hedgerows become fragmented – which is what Hampshire County Council endorsed – populations not only lose essential feeding and breeding habitat.