



“Never let a good crisis go to waste” (Winston Churchill)

“You can’t self-isolate against climate change” (Mark Carney)

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ACAN's 2020 Vision survey

Now is the time to learn from the Coronavirus crisis and pursue a greener, cleaner, fairer future which addresses the climate and environmental crises.

During May 2020 Alton Climate Action & Network (ACAN) asked local people what are the positives from lockdown and what they would like to keep in the post-Covid recovery.

The 53 responses covered a wide range of aspects of life under lockdown and beyond, giving 248 topic-related responses (see analysis spreadsheet).

Drawing on respondents' views, this document is ACAN's stocktake of local community action: what is already happening and shorter- and longer-term proposals. We want the community to debate and improve it and come together around our **2020 Vision: building back better**.

Lessons learned

All survey respondents were very keen that we take stock of the lessons learned and their implications for how councils and national government can tackle the climate emergency. Several made the point that *if we can move mountains for a virus let's do the same for the even bigger global crisis which is climate change*. National opinion polls consistently show that people believe the climate is as at least as serious a long-term crisis as the Covid-19 pandemic.

If we were ever in any doubt, we now understand what a global emergency looks like; something that affects everyone and in profound ways. As with the climate emergency, we are all in this together. 2020 Vision survey respondents commented:

- We learned that radical change can happen remarkably quickly when everyone gets the message. So crystal **clear messaging is crucial**.
- Thanks to the efforts of local Covid self-help groups, community hubs, and many other public-spirited people, **we are learning what local resilience and community cohesion mean** in practice. We can come together to do remarkable things when motivated.
- With the clearer skies, cleaner air, and the rediscovery of birdsong, we **appreciated nature** like never before. We will be keener to protect our environment in future and not go back to our polluting and damaging former ways.
- When existential threats are looming, narrow financial thinking based on budgeting for the short term may not provide for longer term welfare. Huge sums have been mobilised by central government to offset the impact of the covid-19 crisis, since the long-term costs of inaction would be far higher. This is the kind of thinking needed in tackling the climate crisis.
- We are recognising the inequalities in society more clearly and seeing that coronavirus, like the climate crisis, affects some groups more severely than others. So we have to **embed fairness as a core principle**.
- Some sectors of the economy are not going to bounce back. Air travel is one, and while this may be a cause for celebration for climate activists, it is a real worry for those whose livelihoods depend on it. **Recovery strategies need to be targeted on those most in need and geared to the sustainable industries of the future**, not the polluting ones of the past.

These lessons have important implications for climate action, changing our frame of reference and opening up new opportunities. We must build back better to create the future we want.

Building back better

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to think differently about how we tackle the climate crisis to create the future we want. As Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary General, stated:

“With this restart, a window of hope and opportunity opens... an opportunity for nations to green their recovery packages and shape the 21st century economy in ways that are clean, green, healthy, safe and more resilient.”

A letter from the UK Committee on Climate Change to the Prime Minister set out 6 key principles to rebuild the nation following the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. **Use climate investments to support economic recovery and jobs.**
2. **Lead a shift towards positive, long-term behaviours.** This includes actions to support home-working, remote medical consultations and improve safety for cyclists.
3. **Tackle the wider ‘resilience deficit’ on climate change** – reducing the UK’s vulnerability to the destructive risks of climate change
4. **Embed fairness as a core principle.**
5. **Ensure the recovery does not lock-in greenhouse gas emissions or increased risk.** As it kick-starts the economy, the Government should avoid locking-in higher emissions or increased vulnerability to climate change in the longer-term. Support for carbon-intensive sectors should be contingent on their taking lasting action on climate change. All new investments need to be resilient to future climate risks.
6. **Strengthen incentives to reduce emissions when considering tax changes.** Low oil prices provide an opportunity to increase carbon taxes without hurting consumers.

Oxford University backed this up with economic evidence showing that “green projects create more jobs, deliver higher short-term returns per pound spent and lead to increased long-term cost savings, by comparison with traditional fiscal stimulus.”

The important role of local government

Alton Town Council, East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County Council have worked extremely hard during lockdown to support individuals, communities and businesses. As the lockdown eases, now is the time for them, in partnership with the voluntary, community and business sectors, to turn their attention to ‘building back better’.

Communicating the climate crisis

Councils have focused recently on sharing clear information on the health crisis and what householders and businesses can do. Covid-19 has featured strongly on website home pages. As lockdown eases, Councils could now start blending in the ‘Build Back Better’ message.

Councils need to better publicise their climate strategies and get the public and local businesses behind them. Alton Town Council and East Hants District Council do not have noticeable information on climate change on their websites. Hampshire County Council has some web pages on climate change but they are three levels down and not flagged on the home page www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/environment/climatechange .

ACTION PLANS

The proposals in the following pages are for debate, involvement and action ... drawing on respondents' ideas from the 2020 Vision survey, what is already happening in and around Alton, and good ideas from elsewhere.

The aim is to help us all to think long term - whilst making continual short-term improvements.

1. Community

Why it is important

Thanks to the efforts of local Covid self-help groups, community hubs, and many other public-spirited people, we have learnt what local resilience and community cohesion mean in practice. We have found we can come together to do remarkable things when the need is there. A third of our respondents praised the key workers and volunteers who have kept us going through the crisis and appreciated the benefits in combatting the problems of mental health and loneliness as well as the more practical benefits.

Many respondents also reported re-evaluating their priorities and hoped that the increased level of volunteering will continue with people sharing more of their time, skills and tools into the future.

Lynn Bonsey said, "We need to support the community spirit, which has been in abundance in lockdown, for it to continue."

If we are to be successful in tackling the challenges of climate change on a local level, we will need to work together and support each other in our efforts to reduce our use of world resources and reduce the levels of pollution we have historically been responsible for.

Proposed projects [those in green are already under way]

1. **ACAN's Community Hub** – when we are finally able to open our hub, post lockdown, we plan to keep open house for people who feel anxious and concerned about the climate and environmental crisis to drop in and chat over tea and biscuits. It has been proven that talking over a problem with others and then taking action is very effective for treating anxieties of this sort.
2. **Alton Community Share** opened its doors on 10th June. It is a free to access library of activities, equipment and toys etc. powered by donations by the community and for the community.
3. **A knit and natter textiles group** was planned where people can come together to learn new skills and share some company.
4. **Discussion groups** – on a variety of topics were planned. We have already started one on using permaculture techniques to increase crop yields and biodiversity in our gardens and allotments.
5. **Home energy surgery** – Energy Alton will be running a surgery where people can ask for help with home insulation and/or schedule a free thermal imaging survey of their home.
6. **Alton Repair Café** – will be back in action as soon as possible and intend to add skills classes to their offering to help people become more resourceful and self-sufficient.

2. Local Food

Why it is important



If we are to make a meaningful dent in our carbon emissions, food production must be tackled. It has been estimated that for every calorie of food that arrives on our plates in the western world around 10 calories of fossil fuels have been used to get it there. This includes chemical herbicides, pesticides, fertilisers, machinery, production, packaging and transport. Currently food production and transportation accounts for about a quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). This cannot continue.

The increased interest in growing our own food in gardens or allotments featured strongly in responses. The reduction in food waste was also celebrated, linked with the increase in home cooking. Many respondents suggested they would continue to buy from local suppliers. Sticking with these practices once the lockdown eases would be a great way of boosting the local economy and tie in with efforts to reduce packaging and food waste as well as GHGs.

Christine Wilkinson said, "This crisis has also shown that we do not need the level of food choices we have become used to and the importance of locally produced and distributed food."

Proposed projects

1. **Community gardening task force** – people who cannot tend their own gardens for whatever reason can ask for a team to work on their garden, restoring order and planting up with fruit, vegetables and flowers as agreed with the householder, then returning to maintain the garden and perhaps share the produce. This could address loneliness amongst the elderly and allow people with mental health issues (accompanied by their carers) to benefit from working with the soil as well as volunteering with a team and helping people.
2. **Community food growing** working parties to help less experienced gardeners to get started.
3. **A communal composting facility** for people with small gardens to contribute garden waste and get back their compost whilst learning new skills.
4. **Cooking local seasonal food** – is another of the planned activities for ACAN's community hub, teaching people with limited cooking skills to produce healthy and appetising family meals with local produce.
5. **ACAN's permaculture group are planning a demonstration plot** to show how easily we can increase the productivity of our own gardens and allotments by following these tried and tested techniques.

3. Active travel – walking and cycling

Why it is important

Over a third of survey responses related to transport and a quarter of those to cycling. Respondents enjoyed feeling safe cycling around town during lockdown, many with their children. Many noted the reduction in air and noise pollution and celebrated the benefits for wildlife and their physical and mental health.



Frustration was expressed over the lack of planning for cycling and walking from and to the new housing estates in Alton.

Safe social distancing cannot be easily achieved on Alton's narrow pavements without temporary modifications to widen them. We urgently need a redesigned road layout to prioritise the limited space available for pedestrians and cyclists. If shoppers feel unsafe they will go elsewhere, endangering the viability of shops and businesses in Alton.

Conditions for cycling and walking in Alton tend to be poor. Alison Melvin said, *"We have always been a pro-cycling family and it seems so sad that I had to forbid my children from cycling on local roads (and myself drive to work when I only worked 3 miles away), because local roads are more dangerous to cyclists than London!"*

What we need to do

With representatives from all 5 local cycling groups, Cycle Alton has recently been set up to campaign and work with local authorities on plans for safer cycling in our town. Cycle Alton's main focus is on short cycling trips such as those made by utility cyclists and commuters, to promote cycling as the natural choice for short journeys around the town, and between the villages and the town.

The group has identified a range of issues concerning local bicycle riders and is already liaising with all three tiers of local government and Cycle Hampshire, an umbrella body of similar cycle campaign groups around Hampshire.

Proposed projects

1. **More cycle stands** are needed at the station and in the High Street, possibly with a decorative theme, such as a steam train and a Jane Austen image, at suitable locations.
2. **Producing a map** of local routes, both printed and online to encourage cycle tourism to Alton and the surrounding countryside.
3. **Trial a restriction of through-traffic using the High Street.** Details will be worked on around the premise of timed closures to cars each day (i.e. between 10.00 and 6.00), possibly including access for buses. The closure of half the High Street for the weekly market already sets a precedent. There is a huge body of evidence showing that people who walk or cycle to shops spend far more than those who travel by car. The restriction of through-traffic would allow greater space for social distancing, safe two-way cycling and a more pleasant, less-polluted environment for the public to enjoy a café society. Alton Town Council feel this could be developed as part of a future community project. They have asked us to draw up a 'shovel ready' plan. We aim to produce this in time to access the second tranche of government emergency funds, for their consideration.

4. Green economic recovery & the circular economy

Why it is important

A quarter of responses to the ACAN survey focussed on the need for a well thought out **green recovery plan** post-Covid. A whole range of new jobs need to emerge in the retrofit and renewables sectors if we are to reduce the CO2 emissions from our badly insulated, fossil-fuel dependent homes, offices and public buildings.



Philippa Brealey said, "*Re-employ job losers in new green industries*"

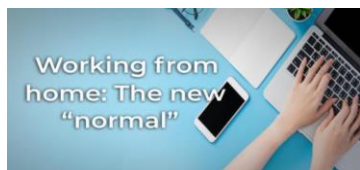
Less consumer choice was seen as positive, reducing time and money wasted on stuff we don't really need. Sharing, repairing, re-using should be promoted as the norm. "*Not every household needs every tool and gadget.*"

Proposed projects

1. ACAN to re-open and promote Alton Repair Café when it is safe to do so (see "Community" page)
2. If successful, ACAN (with the Town Council and Alton Community Association) to continue and develop further Alton Community Share, promoting re-use of material goods, saving people money and bringing the community together (see "Community" page)
3. Councils to support **sustainable job creation** by working with trade bodies, local firms and other partners to support skills training and apprenticeships
4. Councils to bring forward plans to **upgrade council-owned schools, social housing and office buildings**, especially if infrastructure funding emerges from central government.
5. Councils to support the local green economy by **setting higher sustainability standards for suppliers** and amending their procurement rules to favour local firms, as Preston City Council have done.
6. Council backed **investment bonds** for green infrastructure projects are an idea that has been floated to raise funds for cash-strapped local authorities. This is being investigated by West Berkshire Council.

5. Home working

Why it is important



Home working increased greatly during lockdown. Respondents to the 2020 Vision survey commented on the benefits with on-line meetings accepted as the new normal (although some face-to-face interaction was felt to be needed too). This revolution in working practice would have taken years under normal circumstances but

has happened in a few weeks.

Home working is important in the fight to reduce carbon emissions because it results in:

- Reduced commuting by car, and reduced pressure on public transport
- Reduced energy consumption to heat and power commercial buildings

Benefits for staff include:

- In some cases, being able to work flexibly at different times to suit family and personal needs
- More time with the family (rather than wasted commuting time)
- Time to notice nature

Proposed projects

1. ACAN and all councils to encourage and **champion home working**, explaining the benefits
2. ACAN and all councils to continue to use **online videoconferencing** for some meetings to reduce travel needs
3. **Set up a work support hub in Alton**, a communal space for people lacking space or equipment at home, with reliable high-speed broadband, printers and bookable meeting rooms.

6. Energy efficiency and community energy

Why it is important

Energy efficiency and community energy schemes were not mentioned by respondents to the 2020 Vision survey, perhaps because the sun was shining throughout lockdown!

The consumption of fossil-fuel generated energy still accounts for about a quarter of the UK's CO2 emissions (although the national grid for electricity now sources much of its supplies from renewable sources and coal is being phased out). Gas is still the main fuel for heating. The majority of both existing and new buildings are energy inefficient and very few new houses or retrofits conform to Passiv Haus (nearly carbon neutral) standards.

Energy Alton has for ten years provided energy-saving advice to householders, businesses and community groups and works in partnership with local authorities. Community energy groups organising the local generation of renewable power from solar and wind have emerged across the country. Energy Alton is a member of Community Energy England, within which Community Energy South acts as a local umbrella organisation, mentor and champion for the sector.

Proposed projects

1. Continue to reduce energy demand

Energy Alton will continue offer energy surveys and practical advice on how to reduce energy demand by simple measures, such as better insulation, to save CO2 and fuel costs.

2. Community renewables

The solar photovoltaic installation on Alton Library in partnership with Hampshire County Council has been a great success. But Alton lacks a community renewables scheme. Martin Heath from Basingstoke Energy Services Co-op and Martin Smyth from Energy4All will speak at an Energy Alton/ACAN public meeting on 16 September 2020 which aims to kickstart a new initiative.

3. Clean Heat Alton project

85% of domestic heating is still gas-fired. Most of these heating systems will need to be replaced over the next 25 years to significantly reduce carbon emissions. The Clean Heat Alton Project seeks to provide information and guidance to householders in the Alton area on how to choose viable low carbon options for heating their type of property.

4. Electric vehicles

Energy Alton will continue to support, explain and demonstrate the benefits of electric vehicles, especially when combined with domestic solar power or a community renewable scheme. It campaigns for the provision of widespread EV charging points. It strongly supports the Government's consultation on bringing forward from 2035 the phasing out of petrol, diesel and hybrid powered vehicles.

7. The natural environment

Why it is important



The UK's biodiversity and the abundance of many species have been massively depleted by habitat loss, management changes, housing development and persecution. Human beings are part of the wider ecosystem which supports us. Insects generally and pollinators in particular have declined greatly; pollinators are essential for growing food. Trees sequester carbon, and so too does healthy soil, so help in the fight against climate change.

Many respondents to the 2020 Vision survey stressed that nature is not only “nice”, but essential for health and wellbeing. There is abundant evidence that being out in nature improves mental health, reducing anxiety and stress levels. Respondents noted the reduction in air and noise pollution and celebrated the benefits for both wildlife and people's health. It was also suggested that we need to make Alton as attractive a place as possible to spend time in so that we are not constantly planning our next escape on holiday!

Proposed projects – (those in green are underway or being planned by ACAN/AVLAN – Alton and Villages Local Action for Nature)

1. **Promote wildlife-friendly gardening** – organic, no chemicals, pollinator-friendly plants, home composting
2. **Riversearch** – monitoring and protecting the River Wey in Alton
3. **Local Community Open Space management** – delegated from EHDC via a Memorandum of Understanding
 - a. **Produce a map of who owns what verge and green space**
4. **No pesticides in public places** – not spraying the perimeters of play areas etc. – Alton Town Council, East Hants District Council, Hampshire County Council
5. **Stop verge mowing in spring/early summer** to preserve wildflowers – Alton Town Council, East Hants District Council, Hampshire County Council
6. **Promote Plantlife's “No Mow May”** in gardens and public places, for wildflowers
7. **Work with schools** – more emphasis on nature and the environment in the school curriculum and encourage more outdoor schooling
8. **Make bio-char not bonfires** - they can damage health. Education campaign to create charcoal for gardens.
9. **Promote wild gardening or rewilding**, e.g. <http://wearetheark.org/> Give some of your garden or land back to nature – allow wild flowers and shrubs to grow naturally