



GUILDFORD ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

*newsletter*

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*The Surrey / West Sussex border path by Ellie Morgan*

# SUSTAINABILITY AFTER COVID-19...

**Report by: Adrian Thompson, GEF Chair,**

We are at a very early stage in the pandemic caused by COVID-19 and still have little idea just how long it will be before many can safely get on a bus, train or tube or talk to others face to face.

However, at GEF we are convinced that massive changes are needed in our future priorities. We need to agree on a much healthier and more sustainable way of life.

**Please help us push for real changes!**

At GEF we have been increasingly concerned for many years at the direction that much of the world has chosen. We continue to believe that the residents of Guildford (and elsewhere) need to set a new course. We should build from certain known causes of the current lockdown, which include the following:

- Poor food hygiene and animal testing standards in China and elsewhere.
- Well-publicised warnings of a likely pandemic have been ignored, especially by much of the western world. Air travel has rapidly spread the virus across the world. Most countries were much too slow to limit air travel or impose conditions despite the knowledge of the risks that were being taken. To make this worse, the world has continued to subsidise air travel and bail out with vast subsidies a form of travel which is a major contributor to the Climate Emergency.
- A lack of respect for science, especially in many western governments, which has also led to the Climate Emergency becoming so urgent.
- Governments have not worked well together. President Trump's failure to work with China on understanding and containing this threat before it spread abroad too widely is the worst example.

As a result the national debt of the western world (and especially the UK and USA) will probably be higher than at any time since WW2. We need to find a new economic order if we are to avoid saddling future generations with unsustainable debt levels for decades ahead.

The lockdowns that have resulted from the need to contain COVID-19 have highlighted the following:

- Air quality has improved dramatically as fossil fuel burning has reduced. Poor air quality kills approximately 7 million (WHO best estimate) people across the world every year, compared with well under half a million to date from COVID-19.
- Millions of businesses, run by hard-working conscientious individuals and companies across the world, will never recover and livelihoods and savings will be lost.
- UK Government finances, which had taken 10 years of austerity to recover from the financial crisis of 2008, will be even higher than 10 years ago. Taxes look as if they will have to rise to pay off that debt.
- World oil prices have fallen very rapidly (by about a half at the time of writing) as oil producers had over-invested in

fossil fuels and are uncertain about the future demand for oil, gas and coal.

- A higher priority is now being given to the previously much-neglected natural world and also to green spaces. Parks, gardens and nature are needed today more than ever as a source of fresh air and exercise at a time when millions across the world are otherwise locked into high rise flats or confined spaces.

The Climate Crisis Group (CCG) of GEF believes, however, that COVID-19 does offer an opportunity for a massive shift in our priorities. A change of course is needed now if the world is to avoid the even more severe threat to everyone on this planet – the Climate Emergency.

At GEF the Climate Crisis Group have therefore considered how we can all work together (as we did after WW2) and benefit from these salutary lessons and press for a more sustainable and better future. During the most challenging days of WW2, plans were put in place for the UK National Health Service, which was launched in 1948. We now need a similar level of far-sightedness to secure a fairer and healthier future for the UK and the world. However, we are optimistic about the future so long as we are prepared to learn the following lessons quickly:

## SUMMARY

**1. We must localise infrastructure projects.** We need to give much more thought to the state of the world that we pass on to future generations as regards better prioritising future investment and also improved climate awareness in schools.

**2. We must consume less and live more sustainably within the Earth's resources.** We need to recognise that the last 30 years surge of largely uncontrolled consumption across the world has failed. In the future we can live better and far more healthily with significantly less consumption.

**3. We must change the way we travel.** Do we need to fly across the world or to go on a cruise or should we enjoy what we have nearer to hand?

**4. We must strengthen our sense of Community again.** Can we learn from COVID-19 and help our neighbours more? As Guildford still has plans to build new homes over the next 10 years, the benefits of community should be at the heart of all those plans. This has been very successfully achieved by our twin City, Freiburg in Germany.

**5. We must reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions much faster than we have in the past.** Step 1 is to use less energy. Step 2 is to press for a new Carbon Tax in the UK and across the World. The new tax should be introduced progressively so as to reflect the full environmental cost of carbon emissions by 2025. Step 3 is to invest much more in green technology.

**6. We must invest in home heating that is not fossil fuel dependent.** This needs to focus locally on improving the existing infrastructure.

**7. We must tax more fairly and raise more from taxation** both locally and nationally to quickly reduce the massive deficits that will result from COVID-19.

**8. We must value the natural world more,** especially all that is close to our doorstep.

## SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

### 1. Localising infrastructure projects.

Here are some examples. Various controversial projects should be scrapped so as to focus on sustainable projects. The cost should be re-allocated to smaller and more sustainable projects such as better local electric buses and better local rail, cycle and walking networks. Actions:

- Stop the expansion of Heathrow airport now to save £100bn or more. Demand for flights is likely to be very much lower in future when the cost of flights does not include Government subsidies and recognises the (not so hidden) costs of transferring the COVID-19 virus across the world.
- Stop HS2 now, saving £100bn or more and upgrade more local services.
- Stop the planned £28bn investment in roads and invest in proper long term maintenance of our existing roads. Part of this saving should also be invested in broadband so as to make home working more effective.
- Invest instead in renewable wind, hydro and solar power, where there will be benefits for the next 50 years or more. Guildford Borough Council (GBC) should lead by example in a much greater scale than today. Britain can lead the world as a result of our natural resources. We should be world leaders in wind turbines and wave power, which are needed as we replace our former reliance on oil and gas
- Improve awareness of Climate education in schools by means of free material such as that available on <https://tropicsu.org/resources/lesson-plans>.

### 2. Consuming less today and living more sustainably.

Increasingly over the last 30 years most governments (partly

in response to popular demand) have forgotten the basic rule, understood by indigenous communities for millennia, that you cannot live beyond the ability of the planet to provide. We are already on track for some 10 billion people to feed and house. Practical suggestions include:

- Reduce our need for energy by turning down our thermostats in winter, switching to LED lighting, wearing warmer clothing, drying clothes outdoors, using less water for showers and re-using and sharing generally.
- In the UK the main political parties have failed to address unhealthy eating and drinking, with the result that (according to the Nuffield Trust) in the last 25 years, the percentage of adults in the UK who are obese has increased from 14.9% to 27.7%.
- Over 60% of UK adults are now either overweight or obese. Obesity is much worse in deprived areas. The cost of this in the UK is £27bn every year and rising (Obesity Health Alliance). Action: The UK Government should ignore the lobbyists in the food industry and tax unhealthy food and drink increasingly. This would bring in income and ultimately save £27bn every year in NHS and Social Care costs.
- Fight food waste. Action: Cutting waste by half would increase world food supply by 20%. We can all help by buying better and eating everything we buy.
- Grow more of our own fruit and vegetables, which often taste much better, too.
- Switching to a vegetarian or vegan diet can improve your health, be just as tasty and can help your bank balance.
- By reducing consumption we will reduce imports of non-essential products.
- The UK should produce much more of our own food. We have a climate that is less affected by the Climate Crisis than areas closer to the tropics.
- Reduce water consumption. Showers use 25% of our water (average time 7.5minutes) and lavatories 22% (Energy Saving Trust). Only 41% have dual flush toilets. Saving water also saves energy consumption and money, so reducing water useage is a win-win.
- To learn more, try reading Tim Jackson's "Prosperity without growth" (<http://www.gefweb.org.uk/GEF%20Dec%2017.pdf>) see page 9 for review.

### 3. Changing the way we travel.

We need to give much more thought to everything that we buy or do. We should all consider the impact on our environment and our local communities. Some examples are:

- A return flight to Thailand uses 6 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> ([www.carbonindependent.org](http://www.carbonindependent.org)) per passenger. That travel alone is over 50% of the annual total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of the average Guildford resident.
- Re-assess our travel to work. During the COVID-19 lockdown, many have saved 2 hours a day in travel time.

It is now much more acceptable to work from home, saving travel time and reducing the need for rush-hour delays and cost. The acceptability of conference calls has shown how little benefit there is in all participants travelling to meetings, especially overseas. On-line conferencing to discuss papers that have already been distributed by e-mail will save massive amounts of time and lead to more focussed discussion and decision-taking. This does not mean that all can avoid travel to work, but a 25% immediate reduction in such travel would free up existing roads for essential travel and stop the need to build new roads.

- Drastically reduce our dependence on cars, which both cause air pollution and burn fossil fuels.
- Transport (at 40% of our total) is the biggest CO<sub>2</sub> emitter locally and in the UK. We must reduce the amount of petrol used by cars. A carbon tax would push every travel choice towards an alternative form of transport or at the very least the use of smaller more efficient vehicles or an electric car. The demand for SUVs in the UK needs to fall.
- Holiday locally. We must disincentivise the booking of overseas holidays. The UK is one of the best places in the world to spend a holiday with so much history, coastline and wonderful green countryside to explore. Many UK residents could halve their carbon footprint by holidaying in the UK.

#### 4. Strengthening our sense of local community.

Many communities have appreciated the opportunity to stand by our houses at 20.00 every Thursday evening in support of our healthcare workers and at the same time getting to know how neighbours are coping (albeit at a safe distance). GEF is doing its bit (and wants to do more) by:

- Developing the Rosamund Community Garden and building a new Hub building for community events.
- Expanding the Swift Box project to encourage local co-operation such as in Godalming (Ockford Ridge), Bentley and Guildford (Holy Trinity).
- Actively helping Community projects such as the Chitty's Common, Merrow Residents Association, Pewley Downs Volunteers, the Small Blue Butterfly project and through Apple Pressing and scything events.

#### 5. Reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

...much faster than we have been, before the impact of the COVID-19 experience. Two massive steps would be:

- To stop subsidising fossil fuels (e.g. we charge lower than 20% VAT on oil and gas heating) and we do not impose a comparable vehicle duty on air travel, when we clearly should.
- To impose a new Carbon Tax in the UK and ideally across

the World. The new tax has to be introduced over time, but if it was clearly flagged from day 1 that by 2025 this tax will reflect the full environmental cost of carbon emissions by 2025, investment decisions could reflect what is needed as quickly as possible.

A first step is to stop all new investment in fossil fuels. Hopefully, this will be self-fulfilling with oil prices falling by 50% in recent months.

#### 6. Investing in home heating that is not fossil fuel dependent.

Heating accounts for 30% of carbon emissions in the UK. The UK has failed very badly in dealing with the existing stock of homes which will account for much of domestic heating emissions over the next 20 years. GEF believes that we must:

- Reduce our need for energy by massively improving home insulation.
- Encourage GBC to speed up the conversion of the remaining properties that it owns to install heat pumps. It has started this process but can do more.
- Press SCC and the UK Government to follow the commitments made by most of the main political parties in their recent manifestos to insulate all homes by 2030, through a programme that starts in 2020.
- Press GBC for much more investment and support for solar panels and renewable energy here in Guildford. With gas boilers being phased out, GEF recommends that solar panels and/or heat pumps should be mandatory before approval is given for extensions and new builds. There are very many sites in Guildford that would benefit, such as schools, churches and Council-owned buildings and sites. A firm set of policies is needed to make this happen.

#### 7. We must tax more fairly and raise more from taxation

... both locally and nationally to quickly reduce the massive deficits that COVID-19 will cause.

- Increased taxes will be essential to reduce the deficits currently being incurred. These should be borne by the many who can afford to pay more tax, but so often use tax consultants to avoid making their fair contribution to society. Inheritance tax, higher rate income tax and off-shoring to avoid corporation tax are three examples.
- The UK should produce much more of our own food. We have a climate that is less affected by the Climate Crisis than areas closer to the equator.

#### 8. We must value the natural world more, especially all that is close to our doorstep.

Over the past 50 years, there have been huge losses in wildlife in the UK and abroad. Numbers of iconic species have dropped – from the skylark and water vole here in the UK, to African

elephants and snow leopards around the world. Precious habitats have been eroded. We are the first generation to realise the impact we are having on the world, and the last one that can do anything about it. It's time we recognised nature's value as our life support system. Here in Guildford, GEF is particularly concerned that we focus on:

- Reducing the use of pesticides such as neonicotinoids and metaldehyde (as in many slug pellets). These have devastated populations of bees and farmland birds. Surrey Wildlife Trust tell us that 41% of insect species face extinction and insects are dying out faster than larger animals.



Swifts at Ockford Ridge by Piotr Szczpa

## Swifts arrive but how much longer can they survive without insects?

by John Bannister

Nature is enjoying a wonderful Spring - at least superficially. Soft greens, blue skies, butterflies galore, silence and only the wind in the trees. But for how long will the silence continue? How long before people rush back to their cars, to airports, to air pollution and the steady ongoing downward drift in our nature depleted countryside?

Most of us have managed during the lockdown and I personally can't wait to see our weakened public transport back at its full strength once more. Maybe some of us have learned something from the experience, because it was so tranquil, so peaceful, although those working from home will have experienced all kinds of stresses. The main lesson for me is that we must show even more respect for nature and never abuse it.

You will have noticed that swifts have returned to Guildford, I saw my first one on 19th April, a solitary bird beating an urgent path to Guildford. But there don't seem to be many insects around at ground level and no insects means no swifts because that's what they eat. Places for them to nest we can do something about by putting up swift boxes and getting local authorities to incorporate swift bricks in new-build developments. Waverley Borough Council must be singled out as doing an excellent job at their Ockford Ridge developments

- Protecting existing biodiversity is critical and we should be aware of the impact of alien species.
- Improving the quality of our rivers and managing them more effectively through appropriate flood management strategies. The River Wey flooded again in February 2020.
- Re-instating the wonderful volunteering to protect our wonderful local nature reserves. Sadly this has now had to stop, but needs more support in the future once we start recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Reducing plastic waste in the environment.

COVID-19 is at present having a devastating effect on our world. Let us all work together to seize this opportunity to bring about a more sustainable future.

by installing many swift bricks and GEF is grateful to have helped them in this work.

Regarding insects we can only plead with you to grow insect loving plants and not to use any insecticides, herbicides or other types of 'cides' in your garden or veg plot, to use your influence to stop such chemicals being used in their ignorance by our councils and the University and last but not least to eat only organically grown food. The Soil Association that administers the standards for organic food and products demands high standards for animal welfare, care of the soil and the food produced.

There has been a huge decline in insect numbers since the 1950's which can be put down, in part at least, to the chemicals we have added unthinkingly to our environment and which we continue to add. We are all guilty as we all drive, use household chemicals, our sheds are full of paint tins and a whole range of miscellaneous chemicals. We are fully signed up to the chemical age. Agriculture uses a myriad of chemical fertilizers, additives and sprays designed specifically to kill insects, molluscs, etc. Some of these run off into local streams and rivers killing invertebrates, that also produce insects. So water bodies which are usually great places to watch swallows, martins and swifts are suffering too.

Swift by Piotr Szczpa



The other thing we have done, is decimate habitats such as meadows, woodlands, hedgerows, and green spaces used by schools and the public. Studies have shown the effects all this has had and continues to have in the blind belief that we must provide a generous lifestyle to people first and foremost and accommodate their every need. The latest studies, some going back over 50 years, show an 80% decline in insect species across Europe and globally and we must understand before it is too late that insects are absolutely fundamental to food webs and the existence of life on our planet.

We've watched this happening over our lifetime and some will remember people having to stop their car to clean the windscreen of insects. This is certainly not a problem today.

The other causes are the impact of the climate crisis, and

light pollution has also been cited. In one study area the average temperature has gone up by 1.5 degrees, rainfall has increased and water temperatures have risen by 1.88 degrees. For creatures that evolved over millions of years this can be a disaster. Matt Shardlow, CEO of the charity Buglife, said these studies reinforce our understanding of the dangerously rapid disappearance of insect life in both the air and water.

So where does that leave swifts and the many other animals that rely on insects for food? Facing starvation and in grave jeopardy.

### If you want to help

...and would like a free swift box for your house or church or other public building then

**please contact John Bannister at GEF on 07443914347 or 01483 570468.**

I have a stock of boxes ready to hand out on a first come first served basis.

It would be good to know before doing so that you have seen swifts in previous years around your house or in your near neighborhood, that you have a ladder that can reach your eaves and that you have a power drill. Everything else will be provided, possibly even someone to shimmy up the ladder and do the fixing!



has allowed me to get to know. During lockdown it has been essential to continue to visit the garden and tend to it, but now we cannot meet as a group once or twice a week as we used to. Instead our community of volunteers have devised a rota, with someone visiting most days to maintain our programme of sowing, planting, watering, harvesting and general maintenance. I miss the contact and conversation with the other volunteers, but still find Rosamund an important place of hope, friendship and peace and I look forward to my weekly visit,

## Rosamund Community Garden – Our Journey Through Lockdown

Article by Helen Harris  
Photos by Annelize Kidd

One of the heartening outcomes of lockdown has been the stories and pictures we hear and see of people across the country getting to know their neighbours, developing their sense of immediate local community and having the time to notice and engage with the natural world around us. Even if that is simply having more time (with less competing human noise) to hear the chorus of morning and evening birdsong.

I have been a volunteer at Rosamund Community Garden now for approaching three years and an important part of what I love about the place is the diverse network of people it

now accompanied by my children. Seeing the new tomato seedlings left by Ann, an entry in the planting diary, a freshly weeded section of bed, extra tape on the hole in the poly-tunnel or a message on the whiteboard are all signs gratefully received that we are still a community working together and remind me that this too shall pass.

With daily care, the garden is thriving. Our orchard has bloomed, the purple sprouting broccoli and asparagus have come and gone and we have been wading through salad. The wind blows through the poplars, the butterflies dance and the skylarks soar and sing.

We also continue to plan future development of the garden. In early March, I visited the Farnham Community Garden Space2Grow and was inspired by what they have achieved. In just 3 years, Corin Harrison and his team have transformed a piece of waste ground into a beautiful space in central Farnham, used by hundreds of people each week in summer months, especially by those within the area who are more vulnerable and in need of support. <https://www.space2grow.space/>

At Rosamund, we would love to develop the garden in a similar direction. We have recently self-assembled into a formal association, linked to GEF, with a committee and a constitution so we can apply for funding from Guildford Borough Council and the Community Foundation for Surrey.

## Airport Expansion grounded putting many infrastructure projects in doubt

By John Bannister

In GEF's September – November 2019 newsletter we gave some details of the proposed London Heathrow third runway project designed to greatly increase flights and passengers out of London's largest airport. In February the Court of Appeal upheld a case brought by legal charity Plan B and backed by Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and many other citizens groups to refuse this third runway project.

The crucial legal reason, and this is key and could be very far reaching indeed, was that Heathrow Ltd had failed to take account of the Paris climate change agreement, which the UK has signed. In so doing, it was a breach of the Planning Act 2008. This is a legal precedent and will affect other legal challenges to

Funds awarded would enable us to build a Community Hub and better toilet facilities at the garden. This shelter would host a wider range of community groups and events, opening the space to more people in the locality who could benefit from its tranquillity, beauty and potential for growth.

I am pleased to say that we were successful in the first grant application to Guildford Borough Council and we await news of our second application. We will hopefully know the outcome in July. If we can secure sufficient funding now during lockdown, we will be in a good position to progress with building the hub, using a local contractor once lockdown restrictions are lifted. We will update on progress in future newsletters. Until then, keep safe and well.



environmentally destructive projects that have not shown due regard for the commitments set out in the Paris Agreement and the UK's net-zero target.

The courts have recognised specifically how the climate crisis needs to be at the heart of major infrastructure decisions. This is the first time that the courts have upheld the Paris agreement on climate change to reject a case that will increase the UK's carbon emissions and risks jeopardising the 1.5 degrees warming target. Other projects like HS2, big road building schemes, energy schemes, etc will be scrutinised differently in future. Heathrow will appeal to the Supreme Court but the government will not. This decision breathes much needed new life into those campaigners who really want to do something about the climate crisis and the ongoing damage to our wildlife.

# A Turning Point for the Sustainability of UK Agriculture?

By Matthew Ambrose

## A Global Perspective

With a rising global population and ecological and climate crises underway, humanity is facing something of a perfect storm. There is an increasing demand for food overall, and for meat specifically, as developing nations become wealthier. The very limited land area on which to expand agriculture (especially if we are to preserve the world's remaining relatively intact ecosystems), and a rate of yield increase that has slowed considerably shows us that, the "Green Revolution", for all its astounding success, has reached its limits. At the same time, the majority of the planet's arable soils are currently in a race to the bottom in terms of the rate at which they are eroding. Particularly in countries like the UK which have long employed highly mechanised, large-scale industrial agriculture, decades of deep ploughing and overexploitation have resulted in soils which are decreasing

in fertility as their organic carbon content is lost to the atmosphere, as well as being physically eroded and washed into rivers and seas. Erosion rates of ploughed fields average 10-100 times greater than soil formation rates, and soil degradation has been estimated to cost \$10 trillion per year globally, and £1.2 billion a year in England and Wales.

## UK Agricultural Sustainability

In the UK, we also face concerns over the impact of our land management practices on wildlife.

71% of the UK's land area is occupied by agriculture, so the way we farm has huge implications for our wildlife and natural environment. Most of our farmland has seen huge intensification, particularly since the Second World War, with the heartbreaking loss of 97% of UK wildflower meadows contributing to declines like that of the cornflower, of around 99% over 50 years, and reports like the 2019 State of Nature

Report only confirm continuing declines in abundances and distributions of UK wildlife. However, alongside this process of intensification, the UK has also seen a steady decline in its ability to feed itself, with food self sufficiency falling from highs of up to 82% in the 1980s to around 60% today.

Our subsidy arrangements have also exacerbated these problems. Since 1973, when we joined the EU, we have been a part of its Common Agricultural Policy, which pays a total of around £3.2 billion a year in subsidy payments to UK farmers. These payments, as across the EU, have been separated into two 'Pillars': Pillar I, in the UK, consists of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), paying farmers a set amount only on the basis of the number of hectares which they own, whereas Pillar II is more focused on environmental stewardship and makes payments to farmers based on specific environmental goals. Despite farmers being required to meet certain environmental

requirements even to receive Pillar I BPS payments, there has been a low level of enforcement. Worse, the vast majority of the total UK CAP allowance was spent in BPS payments (approximately 80%), despite attempts to increase the share of money going to environmental stewardship programmes under Pillar II to around a third. And even within the Pillar II Environmental Stewardship schemes in the UK, the vast majority of money allocated was spent on entry level schemes, rather than the more involved higher-level stewardship schemes. As the UK Government's 2018 25-Year Environment Plan acknowledges, CAP "concentrates money in the hands of those who already have significant private wealth, without improving environmental outcomes".

## A New Environmental Focus?

However, the necessary restructuring of our agricultural policy and subsidies following the Brexit referendum result, has provided a potentially once-in-a-generation opportunity to finally place more of an emphasis on environmental aims, especially considering subsidies now comprise around 50% of many farmers' incomes. Natural resource economists have long argued for a 'natural capital' approach to farm subsidies. With the publication in 2018 of the Government's '25-year Environment Plan', and more recently, in February of this year, the policy update "Farming for the Future", it is clear that the Government is moving towards the implementation of a system of 'public money for public goods'. Public goods being 'services' such as the provision of clean water, flood protection, the drawdown of CO<sub>2</sub>, and biodiversity enhancement.

Indeed, the 'Farming for the Future' document is particularly notable for its emphasis on the fundamental reform of agricultural policy towards a public money for public goods system, to replace the "deeply flawed" EU Common Agricultural Policy. This aims to create a "more dynamic, self-reliant agricultural industry", whilst, critically, "rewarding those farmers who take the health of soil, the quality and management of water, and the abundance of pollinators as seriously as the size of their yields."

The replacement for the CAP subsidies is currently planned to be the Environmental Land Management scheme, or ELMs, to be officially phased in from 2024 to 2027 following pilot schemes beginning in 2021. These ELMs schemes are currently

Picture taken by Matthew Ambrose from the top of St Martha's Hill on the North Downs Way



### OUR HUNGRY PLANET

Global food demand is set to increase by 35% in the next 10 years and currently 75% of the world's food is generated from 12 species of plant and 5 species of animal.

### FACTS & FIGURES

Plants produce 80% of the world's calories whilst only using 20% of its agricultural land. More of us eating a vegetarian diet could be a crucial first step in ending world hunger.

# A Turning point for the sustainability of UK agriculture, continued ...

proposed to be split into three tiers. Tier 1 payments would be made to incentivise environmentally sustainable farming and forestry, through actions such as planting cover crops and sowing wildflower margins. Tier 2 payments would be targeted towards more involved and specific locally targeted outcomes. Tier 3 would cover more ambitious landscape-scale restorations, with exciting scope to link up such initiatives at a regional and national level, and potential integration with the 25-Year Environment Plan's 'Nature Recovery Networks'.

The risk in all this exciting change, from an environmentalist's point of view, is that despite an ostensibly revolutionary reorientation of the subsidy regime towards environmental aims, the vast majority of payments may still end up going into Tier 1 ELMs schemes. These could remain relatively low-level in impact, lack the landscape-scale ecological connectivity crucial for species recovery, and remain relatively poorly enforced. Environmental goals could again become isolated in silos in a small number of higher-level schemes. An indication of the true scale of change will be given by observing the proportion of funding which goes to Tier 2 and 3 schemes, and how the schemes engage the farming community.

## Working with Farmers

Farmers make up only around 1.7% of the UK workforce, and a similarly small fraction of national GDP, at around 0.6%. Yet they are far more critically important than this relatively low economic valuation suggests. They are the stewards of the majority of our countryside, and are the best placed to take action to increase biodiversity and bring our wildlife back from the brink; but they must be supported to do so. Organisations like Plantlife have been calling for years for more support for farmers who make serious commitments to delivering biodiversity and environmental aims on their farms. There is strong evidence from comparative studies that agri-environment schemes which give farmers a significant degree of agency to design their own environmental solutions produce better results. They are also far more likely to change

the farmers' attitudes in the long-term towards biodiversity and environmental issues, compared with more bureaucratic, top down schemes. Ultimately, if farmers decide to manage for environmental outcomes, they will deliver on them.

One suggestion for enhancing farmers' stake in environmental actions in the context of the new ELMs schemes has been to switch from the present model of payment negotiation to an 'auction'-based method. Currently 'deals' are made individually with each farmer in terms of what environmental benefits and actions they will provide in exchange for agri-environmental payments. An auction-based system would instead involve farmers bidding competitively for the environmental aims and actions they could take on their farms, and could potentially take better advantage of farmers' knowledge of their own land, enhance cooperation on more ambitious schemes between multiple farmers, and deliver better environmental outcomes overall. However, it remains to be seen whether this approach could be taken up in the future.

There is certainly a lot of change on the horizon; something else to watch out for is the release, planned for late this year, of a DEFRA-commissioned review of the UK's entire food system which will inform a new 'National Food Strategy'. As the ELMs schemes roll out, and as trade deals are negotiated in preparation for the end of the UK's Brexit transition period, we will get some sense of how transformative that change will be.



Tractors at the South of England Show by Ellie Morgan

# THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE! REALLY ?

by Michael Tanner

Well, here we ALL are, crouching or scurrying on our spit of sand, at varying distances from each other, while two massive torrents surge down each side whittling the sand away and, no doubt, seeping underneath everything we thought solid. The dangers seem obvious, perhaps 'solution' is not a happy word to be 'using' in the circumstances.

Or you might prefer the 'Flak' metaphor: deadly enemy in the night sky overhead, blast away at him with everything you have in your anti-aircraft guns; you are bound to hit something.

**Life on hold**  
Public health restrictions to prevent the spread of Covid-19 have resulted in a sharp dip in air pollution across China, Europe and the US, with carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels heading for a record 5% annual drop.

## FACTS & FIGURES

Whilst COVID -19 has highlighted the potential dangers associated with international travel. Internationalisation, including free trade and international tourism, have many benefits. But we are starting to see many potential issues, including contributions to environmental pollution and the spread of disease

Undoubtedly, the one tool we have most utilized against the dual menace of Covid 19 and Climate Change, are words, which we have unleashed in every direction we could turn, and, of course, that is what I am doing at this very moment.

One thing is sure, we are not in a novel situation, however much we hype it to be just that. 'We' being the inhabitants of this globe at this moment. 'We' with such short and inaccurate memories and the tendency to suppose we are the brightest and most afflicted of humans so far, in homo sapiens' existence.

But, like most other commentators I do express a sorrow for those who have died before their time, for those who could not say 'Goodbye' to the ones taken from them, for those who really do not see any way of escaping financial disaster or associated forms of premature death. Perhaps such expression is a mark of being human, though elephants, at least, seem to demonstrate a similar emotion..

Most of us have some idea of what has afflicted large numbers of human beings over the past 106 years alone: two world wars, nuclear bombs (and the threat of), genocides, gas chambers,

epidemics verging on the PAN type, millions treated as expendable, and something else which has turned into an affliction - a rate of change and a kind of change we were not, are not prepared for. 'We' is the new emerging 'We' - Now it means all the billions of us, about seven and a half at the moment; it means everyone in the same vast frying pan.

So many questions now being asked; so many experts; so many forecasts; so many solutions; so many diagnoses; so many with neither the time nor the energy nor the facilities to work out solutions or apply remedies. And indeed we are not ants, which make solutions for the mass, as though the mass were the individual.

Is there any solid common ground on which to sit and meditate? How about the following..... 'WE have got ourselves into the throes of rapid Climate Change'; the roots of that failure are the same as the roots of the current Pandemic - a grossly insufficient knowledge of human nature; a grossly deficient knowledge in all the sciences and technologies; an awful habit of letting the end justify the means; and a very poor understanding of brakes and braking. The list goes on and on and if one ever gets to the end, someone will pop up and say you could summarise the lot in a single sentence.

After that indulgence in metaphor which I have tried to base on facts and before a few salient facts, just one more metaphor: imagine an ocean whose floor is covered to some depth with silt. Imagine that silt is composed entirely of statistics in layers representing the centuries. Over millennia these go the way of marine sediment, consolidate and are compressed. The lowest layers would be very thin, the most recent very much thicker. At some time earth movements will push them up to the surface of the planet and if intelligent life is still around, no doubt it will try to interpret the stories within the layers with an incredible curiosity and inventiveness.

Yes, yes ... where are these facts you mention?

Let's begin with one that is poignantly ironic: The undoubted

saving of life from the measured reduction of nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere, recorded by the European Space Agency is unlikely to offset the loss of life caused by the Corona virus. NO<sub>2</sub> is emitted from road transport, power plants and other industrial processes. It happens not to be a Greenhouse Gas. I do not have the worldwide stats of people killed by road transport and how would one measure the associated human suffering by relatives and others? How could that have been allowed to happen? Answer that in depth and you have an answer to much else that has gone wrong in the 'developed' world. Incidentally, the WHO is investigating whether airborne pollution particles may be a vector that spreads Covid 19 and makes it more virulent.

These are just more hints that the growing science of ecology currently in its infancy needs to grow faster and needs to have a major authoritative, independent voice in the policies of governments and in the highest echelons of institutions including banks and the management of energy production. Yet another irony, and there are plenty of them; note the striking efficiency of South Korea in controlling the terrible suddenness and spread of Covid 19 - that alongside the other fact of its huge fleet of coal-fired power plants (largely fuelled by Australian opencast coal.) And not a great deal has been said about the entrapment of industrially polluted air at the higher end of the Po valley in Northern Italy, where NO<sub>2</sub> levels have now fallen by about 40%. Polluted lungs in that entrapment area would have been much less capable of surviving a serious lung condition. The question shouts itself: how do such circumstances flourish in developed countries, let alone what is likely yet to happen in the less developed countries? I suggest that warning voices were simply not heeded by those with financial clout. But how did those with the financial clout evince such an ignorance of realistic and long term economics? Rhetorical question! Such ignorance should never have access to such power. Undoubtedly, Italy is not the only European Country where major cities have suffered and are suffering such 'retribution'. Who really knows if electrically powered vehicles are going to be the solution currently envisaged and will simply regard that as a band wagon to be jumped on. Nearer home, it is estimated

that about 80% of NO<sub>2</sub> emissions are caused by road traffic emissions in our own Capital.

One of the major current questions now becomes clear: We have in the UK, since the end of February seen how the diminished use of cars alone has gone along with changes in work practice and other aspects of lifestyle. When 'lock down' restrictions are lifted are we going to rush back into all our old bad habits or make a lasting effort to learn from the experience. WE have all heard the assertions that this will be the case. Such optimism is hardly based on what happened after each of the world wars. However, it is interesting how the Black Death in Europe made labour so scarce that the ordinary man found for a while that he was actually highly valued financially and was accorded a much higher degree of appreciation and respect. Well we shall see how those in the public service are to be treated by those who have been so disproportionately rewarded in the past. Who will harvest the crops later this year, who train to serve as a nurse or a doctor, who to be a train driver, a road repairer, a rubbish collector, a teacher?

Above all, we have clearly witnessed to-date the quite evident inadequacy of global institutions in the face of Climate Change: There is no serious doubt that the measures taken so far are not going to achieve the reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the 30 years or less, specified by the experts.

The two torrents which I mention at the beginning of this article are already converging at the tip of our little spit of sand but, in truth, they are both irretrievably linked reasons for not being optimistic in the slightest about the future. That of course is no reason for anyone to give up. The next COP, number 26, is postponed now until the middle of next year – probably good news, because by then we might actually know what has been happening since the beginning of this year.

WE should be long past heeding just what is in front of our noses and has crossed our doorsteps. So one last irony: our terrible shortsightedness alongside our ability to see into Space, perhaps as far as the beginning of Time.



View from Newlands Corner by Ellie Morgan

# THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

## Adrian Thompson (Chair) on the Guildford Environmental Forum (GEF) year to 31st March, 2020.

This report is a summary of GEF's past year and our priorities for 2020/21. A separate article sets out the GEF Climate Crisis group's views about Sustainability after COVID-19.

**A) MEMBERSHIP** As a result of increasing awareness of the Climate Emergency, membership of GEF has continued to improve. Membership has grown by 64 or one third in 2019/20, with 72 new members and 8 members discontinuing. There were 26 new members who joined in the last two months, following the successful presentations by Henrietta Stock and the GEF Climate Crisis Group. Over two thirds of members now pay by standing order.

**B) FINANCE.** The surplus for the year of £529 included a grant of £1,000 for the swift project from the Community Foundation for Surrey, received in Feb 2020. Members donated significantly to the swift projects. Subscription (plus associated gift aid income) rose by £520 as a result of the increase in members. Other donations from members were much higher and in total exceeded £1,000. Expenses were generally lower except for nearly £600 that was authorised by the Exec committee in July 2019 and spent on promoting GEF and supporting presentations to potential new members.

**C) BUDGET.** With a cash balance of nearly £5,800 at the end of March 2020 and rapidly rising subscription income and gift aid (67% up in 2 years), the Executive Committee approved a budget deficit of £892 in 2020/21 so as to support local projects in the next year.

**D) RESERVES.** At 31st March, 2020, GEF held reserves of £5,797 (2019 - £5,268) of which £665 is in a Restricted Fund for the swift projects and £500 is in a Restricted Fund for the Rosamund Community Garden. That leaves GEF with free reserves of £4,632.

**E) THE GEF CLIMATE CRISIS GROUP (CCG).** The CCG met 8 times last year and the Exec met 4 times. The CCG organised 22 presentations to Community Groups, Residents Associations and Parish Councils (RA's). GEF agreed the dates, prepared the promotional material and organised the presentations with members of the CCG attending to answer questions. The RA's paid for the hall hire and promoted the talks locally. Nine presentations were made before the COVID-19 virus caused the remaining 13 to be postponed. Presentations were successful, with a total audience of 350. So far GEF has gained 20 new members from this initiative and believe that we are now better known across Guildford, but there is a long way to go yet. The CCG has also developed and distributed a questionnaire for attendees and these are being analysed by a placement student from the University of Surrey. A sheet

of tips to guide us all in reducing our carbon footprint is also available on [https://gefweb.org.uk/GEF green tips.doc](https://gefweb.org.uk/GEF_green_tips.doc).

**F) VOLUNTEERS.** GEF pays no salaries, all our work is carried out by volunteers. None of our achievements this year could have been made without the efforts of members who give their time and ideas. We are so grateful that they share our passion to tackle the Climate Emergency and the loss of Biodiversity. We have made significant progress this year, but have only just started to make an impact. We are specifically looking for a Membership Secretary with IT skills to join our team of volunteers.

A huge thank you to every one of you who has helped GEF over the last year. Do help us make other Guildford residents and businesses aware of our existence and encourage them to join us. Despite the postponement of the AGM, the Executive Committee has co-opted some new members and the CCG also has a full complement and will continue with its vital work.

**G) KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2020/21.** These can be summarised as follows:

- Climate Change. The CCG will continue to work with Guildford Borough Council (GBC) with two members on the GBC Climate Crisis and Innovation Board and offering our advice whenever possible. In addition, the CCG will be seeking to re-arrange all the talks postponed this Spring and hopefully this will be possible next Autumn and Winter.
- Loss of Biodiversity. We are delighted that Helen Harris has agreed to become both Chair of a new GEF Biodiversity Group and Chair of the new Rosamund Community Garden Committee. GEF are keen to support the new Hub project at the Rosamund Community garden, please see more on pages 6 and 7 of this newsletter.
- Working with other Guildford Groups. We are building relationships with other Guildford volunteer groups such as the Guildford Society and Extinction Rebellion (XR).
- Developing GEF's database and website. We are grateful that Raymond Smith continues to maintain the GEF website. It contains a lot of valuable information and links and can be accessed on <https://gefweb.org.uk>. Matthew Ambrose, our Communications Officer is leading a small group to develop the website, during the lockdown. We have also identified some suitable and affordable software to develop our membership database.
- We are always looking for volunteer expertise to help with the membership database.



## Please think carefully before investing in a car

By John Bannister

When I was growing up in the 40's and 50's my family had no car. My father cycled the six miles to work and back and my sisters and I walked or cycled quite a long way to our schools. But as I recall the same was true then for most youngsters. Nor do I recall many of my fellow students at university having cars. Again we walked or took public transport. Just think of all those stick people in Lowry's pictures of Manchester. How different it is today for wealthy students and youngsters expect to drive a car.

I now find it hard to say a good word about cars, although I used to own one. Until Covid-19 hit our towns our streets were being utterly destroyed by private cars. No longer nice places to be in. I gave up my car soon after retiring when I no longer felt I had to be at a certain place by a certain time or risk letting the team down. I have been without one now for over 20 years. It was Jonathon Porritt who persuaded me to take the plunge and a wonderful feeling of freedom it gave me and I have no regrets at all.

**Here are some of the reasons why I would like to persuade you not to own your own car:**

**1) If you care about the environment about half of a car's environmental impact comes from its construction, maintenance and disposal.** So before you have slid into the body-hugging, cushioned seat and driven down your private drive a great deal of damage has been done by this highly polished symbol of you. So don't even consider it. There are better alternatives.

**2) We have reconfigured the physical and cultural life of our cities and towns and cut great swathes through our already nature depleted countryside to provide for the car.** The Arundel bypass is one such devastating road project that will cut a large, sterile footprint through this lovely part of the South Downs threatening the loss of further wildlife. There have been many other such projects by successive governments unthinkingly accepting the future growth forecasts for traffic, resulting in the raison d'etre for endless road-widening schemes, bypasses, etc. Why isn't this money spent encouraging people out of their cars and onto public transport (a Thatcher legacy) or giving incentives to companies to allow their staff to work from home two or three days a week?

It seems to be working fine during the present pandemic. Maybe this will be one of the benefits to come out of this current crisis.

**3) The lockdown has shown how pleasant, less threatening and how much quieter and safer our towns are without being choked with cars.** How much more attractive for pedestrians, parents with prams and young children and cyclists to have quiet, safe streets. Don't they have a voice, a vote? So I ask you why contribute to more of the same? Forgo the car altogether.

**4) In Surrey our council tax for 2020/21 totaling £909 m for the year comprises 0.4% (£3.8m) for Environment and Planning, versus 6.9% (£62.9m) for Highways and Transport,** this is only slightly less than £64.8m for Education and way less than the £81.2m spent on Council Support Services. How long will it take for our failing councils to get the message that improving roads does nothing for modal shift, which they claim they aspire to, nor for our quality of life. This is not money well spent or how I would like our council taxes to be spent.

### Steps not Revs

The NHS recommends we take 150 minutes of exercise a week and suggests brisk walking as a great way to rack up those active minutes. A brisk walk is about 3 miles an hour, which is faster than a stroll.

## FACTS & FIGURES

You can tell you're walking briskly if you can still talk but cannot sing. Cutting back on using your car for short journeys such as - popping to the shops or taking the kids to school could be a great way to fit in more steps and improve your fitness

**5) Apart from the land taken up by roads themselves there are all the car parking spaces, both surface and multi-storey in our towns,** plus the car showrooms, maintenance shops, filling stations, supermarkets, car factories, dock spaces, airports, etc. These car parks add up to a huge land demand denying the better uses we can envisage and all just for the convenience of car drivers. We should not forget our own drives and garages, also potential spaces for something better, gardens for example. And to cap it all these luxury cars once bought sit idle for 95% of the time waiting for sir or madam to nip down to the shops. I have decided no longer to support the National Trust because beautiful places though they are for most people they are merely a shopping and eating experience with the absolute minimum of exercise involved. Good for the soul maybe but not with the hassle and pollution of getting there. The same goes for RHS Wisley a massive, usually full, car park and a short walk with non-native butterflies thrown in. Again a shopping and eating experience. Is this a good use of global resources? If we all buy cars then this is what we are supporting.

**6) Most cars carry only one person, so the car ends up being a very inefficient form of people transport compared with buses and trains.** These alternatives offer the same range and convenience as a private car and are very competitive on price and are far more enjoyable and less pressure. All those empty car seats add up to 38 million spare spaces a day on our road network. Is that intelligent or plain stupid? If you need a taxi to get you to a station then what's the objection, as you are saved the stress of hunting around for somewhere to park? You end up relaxing and letting the driver take the strain. SUVs suddenly have become popular and being larger are less fuel efficient, take many more resources including steel, plastic (fossil fuels), rubber, precious metals, glass, electronics, etc, in fact all the stuff that goes into building a car (see item 1). So why has the car industry foisted Suv's on us just when we are losing out to the climate crisis. So is this your idea of the best way to run a fair and sustainable society?

**7) The average distance covered by our car journeys is a shocking reflection of car ownership. We are told 25% (one quarter) of car journeys are 3 km or less.** This is the same distance I walk every day to get exercise and do my food shopping. 75% of car journeys are less than 8 km (5 miles). This distance is eminently walkable with a rucksack as long as one is not carrying bottled water or garden compost! These facts are a major reason why car ownership has led to traffic congestion, ill health and urban pollution – and not least the endless intrusion of noise. 20% of Europeans are affected by road noise, a new study by the EEA has shown that noise is leading to 20,000 premature deaths a year, with traffic the biggest culprit. Mental problems are increasing and this is just one more causal factor. I don't think anyone should become a

car owner for this one reason alone.

**8) We are progressively locking in a lifestyle that increases our dependence on cars and helps shut out alternatives like public transport and the sheer joy of walking or cycling.** If governments conclude that everyone wants a car, which helps their definition of a desirable economy, with one worker in 6 in some way part of the car industry, then it means more of the downsides and a less communal society. Public transport remains a disaster in most of the UK and not what it should be, namely, a big part of the solution. There has been a one-third increase in traffic in the last 30 years, locking Britain into a high carbon future. UK motorists drove 255bn miles in 1990 and 328bn in 2018. These numbers explain precisely why our towns and cities are the hideous, unhealthy places they are.

**9) Cars are highly polluting as we all know, despite the efforts of car manufacturers to cheat us about their emissions.** Tail pipe emissions which are the main cause of urban air pollution are not the only pollution sources from cars. Tyres and brakes degrade in a few years into small particles and microplastics that we inhale, along with the tail pipe emissions to the detriment of our health, or get into the environment. They also get into our food chain and are ingested as well by wildlife to their detriment, including fish, mammals, birds, etc. This applies equally to electric battery vehicles and not just fossil fuel vehicles. So don't be fooled into thinking a battery powered car is emission-free as the advertising claims, it is not. In the first place they contribute equally to noise, congestion, accidents and loss of wildlife through road kill and batteries are only as good as the carbon content of our electricity grid or, if you buy Green electricity, then only as good as your supplier claims. On top of which you have to consider the human cost of children working in mines in Africa extracting the minerals used in batteries, at great cost to their lives. Is this what you really want?

**10) Guildford is way behind the best cities and towns when it comes to tackling congestion, air pollution and improving conditions for pedestrians and cyclists.** How many times have GBC executives visited Freiburg and marvelled at the public transport and car free town centre and returned with nothing but a few platitudes and fat stomachs from all the lunches provided by our Freiburg hosts. We need to look no further than Woking, which has a lot of good things happening and Guildford could learn from them on traffic, cycle lanes, peregrines, swifts, solar PV and many other green infrastructure projects. Also, great things are taking place in Birmingham, London, Bristol, Exeter, and around the world including our own twin town Freiburg. But Guildford and Surrey seem unable to get started on this path or be even become a distant follower.

# Surrey County Council Launches Climate Crisis Strategy

By Ellie Morgan

This year on April 14th Surrey County Council launched its climate change strategy.

Based on the ambitions outlined in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and developed through engagement with academic partners, residents, businesses, schools and emergency

The 8 themed chapters are listed below

**Organisation Emissions**

**Transport**

**Energy Generation**

**Housing and Planning**

services, the council outlines its plans to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Aiming to deliver a 'Greener Surrey' the plan sets out 19 targets over a 15 year timeline. From more immediate actions such as the development of an electric vehicle (EV) plan by 2022 to more long term replacement of all council vehicles with zero emission alternatives by 2035.

**Buildings and Infrastructure**

**Waste, Resources and Circular Economy**

**Land Use and Food Systems**

**Industry and Green Economy**

Read the full strategy here <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/climate-change/what-are-we-doing/climate-change-strategy>

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Guildford Environmental Forum aims to improve the environment in and around Guildford for wildlife and for people and to build a sustainable future.

Join us in our work for the town and have this newsletter posted or emailed to you four times a year. Forum membership is only £10 per year or £15 for a couple, while for age 21-25 it's £5 and for under 21s it's free. New members are warmly welcomed.

Please contact Adrian Thompson on 01483 222687 or email [adrian@lampcottage.net](mailto:adrian@lampcottage.net)



## CALENDAR

**All the forum's meetings are open to the public.**

*It won't surprise you to see our calendar is looking a little empty this quarter.*

*Last month, we took the decision to postpone the Thursday 23rd April Guildford Environmental Forum AGM until the Autumn due to the COVID-19 lock down.*

*The further talks we had planned over the summer have also been postponed.*

*At the time of the publication of this newsletter, it is still impossible to say how and when we will be able to resume face to face events but we will continue to look at new ways we can engage with our membership during this unusual time.*

*Do keep an eye on your email inboxes for further updates as this situation develops. We wish you all well and hope to see you soon.*

*Stay Well*

Guildford Environmental Forum's newsletter is published in March, June, September and December.

Please send contributions for the next issue to Ellie Morgan (details overleaf) by Monday 3rd August.

The views expressed in this newsletter are strictly those of its contributors and Guildford Environmental Forum.