



Environment and Green Spaces committee meeting 21 January 2025

Agenda item 8 – Resilience and Adaptation in the face of unavoidable impacts of the changing climate

Presented by - Councillor Alex Kay

Introduction

Paragraph 162 of the National Planning Policy Framework, in the section on climate change, states:

“Policies should support appropriate measures to ensure the future health and resilience of communities and infrastructure to climate change impacts, such as providing space for physical protection measures, or making provision for the possible future relocation of vulnerable development and infrastructure.”

While the Local Plan would be the main vehicle for delivery of these measures, they should be reflected in the Neighbourhood Plan also.

Possible matters for inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan for Bradford on Avon

There are several ways in which our town could well be adversely impacted by the changing climate in the next ten years – the lifespan of the next Neighbourhood plan. While planning for major emergencies and improving the resilience of our food systems, energy supply systems and infrastructure are properly matters for national government to plan for, undoubtedly there will be local impacts where local action and preparedness is possible and essential. This brief paper identifies some key issues and how they might find a place within the next Neighbourhood Plan.

Likely impacts and possible mitigation measures

1 Flooding

It is realistic to expect flooding incidents, as bad or possibly worse, than that of November 2024, to occur in the future at unpredictable frequencies; the climate is changing faster than climate scientists had thought likely, leading to more frequent extreme weather events. Global average temperatures were 1.5°C higher during 2024 than since pre-industrial levels: a red alert for a step change in climatic patterns, which have been manifest during the year.



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Helping citizens likely to be impacted is already in hand to some extent: the Town's CEVs are well organised and enthusiastic responders to a crisis, and some owners of premises that have flooded recently already own and deploy flood gates, pumps and dehumidifiers. In the current Neighbourhood Plan, mention is made of an Environment Agency assessment that in future, up to 190 premises could be at risk of flooding.

The flooding of the town is a product of its geography and geology – factors which cannot be changed. Intensive farming coupled with heavy winter rainfall has led to soil in arable fields being unable to absorb rain when it falls heavily. Changes in land use and management can either help or worsen this situation. Tree planting along the river valley wherever possible, and on sloping land above the river valley would enable more water to be absorbed.

Ensuring that new housing does not worsen the flood risk will be vital. Building on the Old Gold Course/Town Tip, currently a reserve site in Wiltshire's strategic plan, would lead to further run-off from all hard surfaces – house plots, roads, drives and footpaths – in a location not far upstream of the town bridge, a pinch point of the river, and this should be a strong argument for removing this site from future development. Paragraphs 171-172 make clear that where there is a current or future flood risk, development should be steered to other sites.

Currently, most of the properties at high risk of flooding are in some form of business use. It would be useful (if not already being done) to consult the owners on their perception of the viability of continued operation at their current location, and their views on the feasibility and desirability of possibly moving premises to land on higher ground. The town would suffer hugely if businesses decide that they would not be viable in the event of, say, two more floods like that of November 2024. Moving premises to land at a higher level would, in Bradford on Avon, typically mean taking over a residential property; it would be worth discussing with Wiltshire Council a review of land use in and close to the town centre so that changes from residential to commercial use in some premises could be sympathetically considered by Planning Officers. Current high prices for property in the town may however make such options commercially unviable.



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The moving of businesses higher could actually reverse the trend caused by high residential property prices, with businesses closing down and being replaced with residential units, along e.g. Silver Street and Market Street. Often change of use is a cause for refusing planning permission, but it has been easy for developers to demonstrate lack of business viability. Thriving businesses along the river and near the Town Bridge are valuable to the town for tourism and the quality of the historic centre.

Making these properties more resilient to bounce back from inevitable flooding, with effective flood-gates, suitable flooring and other decor for resisting water damage, raised electric circuits and sockets, raised appliances and waterproof storage options, well-maintained drains, sump pumps, and so much more. These modifications require focussed advice and funding support. The local councils, EA and Wessex Water can play a role in this. We cannot promise the river won't flood. It's flooded here ever since the first bridge and first settlement here hundreds if not thousands of years ago, and it's likely to get worse.

Good communications about the risks, warnings and supporting each other as a community (and not making it worse for others: eg. by driving through floodwaters and causing extra damage!)

2 Roads blocked temporarily by fallen trees and flood water

Roadside trees pose a risk in storms with strong winds. Besides the danger of a tree falling on a passing car, cyclist or pedestrian, a fallen tree will block a road, preventing all traffic movement until it can be cut up and removed through action by police and emergency services. In general, private owners do not manage the trees on their land, by felling them when disease is observed, and controlling ivy growth; roadside trees, often outgrown from an unmanaged hedge. Preparedness for this would involve identifying roadside trees which pose a risk, and notifying landowners of their responsibility to manage the trees. Removing heavy growth of ivy reduces the weight borne by the tree and makes the tree less vulnerable to windblow.



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Ensuring road gullies are cleared as soon as leaf fall is complete in November could reduce the incidence of flooded roads; it would be useful to identify stretches of road where water is likely to gather in heavy rain and liaising with Wiltshire Council to prioritise gully clearance in these stretches.

3 Continuing loss of biodiversity

The Town Council now manages a considerable area of green space, giving a good opportunity to enhance its biodiversity, while maintaining enough space for active recreation. Allowing some areas of grassland to be mown infrequently provides food for pollinating insects and birdlife; planting trees has multiple benefits, depending on the species chosen: food and nesting sites for birds, cover for small mammals, improvement of soil structure, shade on days of extreme heat (which are predicted to increase in frequency) as well as, on hillside land above the town and land in the river valley, reducing run-off and mitigating the risk or extent of flooding.

There is still scant guidance for the UK on species to plant that will withstand the temperatures expected over the hundred-year lifetime of trees planted now. The predictions of hotter drier summers and wetter milder winters would not necessarily suit species suited to a Mediterranean climate. The as yet not calculable risk (but still regarded as probable by some climate scientists) of the failure of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (the Gulf Stream) would lead to temperatures 5 degrees on average below our current levels, with major impact on food crops and other plants. The Neighbourhood Plan provides an opportunity to work with local farmers and other landowners (as well as reviewing the management of all green space) to identify places for tree planting and grassland management sympathetic to wildlife, to include in the Plan.

Protection and enhancement of our green spaces for biodiversity could be further enhanced by developing dark, green and blue corridors.

Reducing the town's carbon footprint

The lack of adequate action to mitigate climate change, at national and international level, means adaptation and building resilience is essential; but (as the government's Climate Change Committee reported in 2023) government policy, planning and action in this area has been woefully



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neglected. This means that action at local level, in terms of self-help when extreme weather events occur, and preparation in advance, is essential. Equally important, every fraction of global temperature rise reduces the direst consequences of climate breakdown. For this reason, mitigation as far as possible is still vital, at all household, neighbourhood and nationally.

Transport and travel

Measures to provide options for lower-carbon travel are crucial, and while recent decisions have been positive in this direction, there are other actions that the Town Council could influence. Provision of secure cycle parking close to the centre and shops is limited at present and identifying sites for and installing a few more cycle stands should be a priority. A frequent (every 15 minutes) electric minibus service from, say, the Ashley Road junction on A 363, as far as Sainsbury's, on a continual circuit could make a very significant difference to the number of local car journeys made. The current Town bus route is circuitous and infrequent, thus not providing the convenience that the typical car owner wants, if use of their car is to be reduced. While the use of e-bikes is growing, the heavy traffic on A363 coupled with the steep hills means many older people fear to cycle especially in wet or wintry conditions, and it is very rare in our town to see children, even of secondary age, cycling.

Reducing energy use in buildings

The Town Council has made efforts to reach out to households to encourage installation of solar panels and insulation and to inform people about air-source heat pumps. These efforts should continue. On all new housing, high standards of insulation should be required, as well as orientation of dwellings to south and west and installation of solar panels and/or heat pumps as standard. This will require close liaison with Wiltshire Council to persuade them: there are councils that do manage to insist on this.

All actions to decarbonise households however small can contribute to some small amelioration of impact. Encourage participation in government schemes such as Solar Together.

Other areas of action outside the scope of a Neighbourhood Plan

There is increasing activity at local level around the country in starting to prepare plans for resilience and adaptation to the challenges that the



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breakdown in our climate is already bringing. Such plans must be specific to each area, although there are issues and topic areas that are common to all. I am in contact with various networks involved in this work and would like to work with local people and the Town Council on a plan for Bradford on Avon.

Rachel Berger, Alex Kay

January, 2025