

Our Villages, Our Future - Facing up to Climate Change Together

Laying the Foundations for Community Action

The Opportunity to Come Together

On Monday 26 October, more than 80 people living in the 4Bs (Betchworth, Buckland, Brockham and Box Hill) gathered in Betchworth Village Hall to watch the National Emergency Briefing. The film provides a sobering account of where the climate and the natural world now stand as a result of human activity. After the film, and with the aid of Mentimeter, an online tool for gathering text responses, we used our mobile phones to answer three questions: how did the film make us feel, what did we want from government, and what can we do together? Between us we contributed 167 words of feeling, 160 asks of government and 179 ideas for local action. We also cast 290 votes on each other's ideas to enable us to see what we, as a community, considered most worthy of support.



Shaken, but not defeated

The first responses were raw. Anger and frustration came top, closely followed by fear, worry, sadness and despair. Some people felt helpless ('impotent', 'inadequate'), others guilty, and one person asked the question many were thinking: 'How will I afford it?' Much of the anger pointed outwards, at slow action and at not being listened to.

But that was only half the story. Nearly a quarter of the words were about hope, determination and the need to act, and sixteen people put words of distress and resolve side by side. Being shaken and being motivated, it turns out, often go together.

What we want from government: get on with it

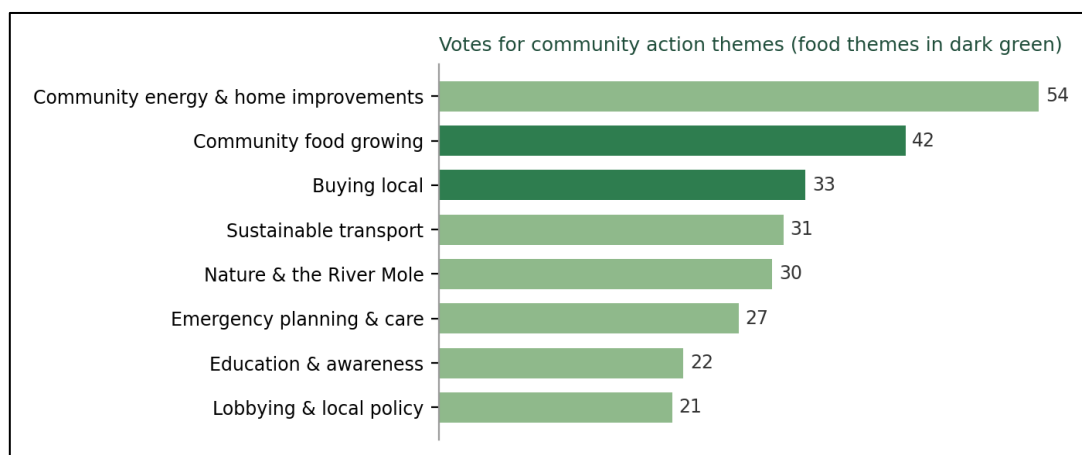
The loudest message was urgency: treat climate change as a genuine national priority, give it the weight we give the economy, and act now. Responses were short and forceful: ‘ACT’, ‘Get a grip’, ‘Be brave’. Many people also wanted the public told the truth plainly, with the briefing itself shown on national television and in schools.

“Be honest and communicate the problem as an emergency in the same way as was done for COVID.”

People also wanted water companies held to account for sewage in our rivers, help with solar panels, heat pumps and insulation so that going green is ‘not something just for the wealthy’, support for farmers and food security with more encouragement for us to *grow our own food*, and cross-party plans that outlast a single parliament and provide leadership to face a global threat to humanity. Together, these give us a clear, home-grown message for our MP and our Councils. We want our leaders to lead us in a coherent and cohesive way.

What we can do together: less talk, more doing

This is where the evening came alive. There is no shortage of ideas within our community. Give people the chance to talk to each other and share their imaginations and a multitude of ideas emerges. And, because people could vote for each other’s ideas, we can see not just what was suggested but what the room got behind. One pattern stands out: ideas for raising awareness were suggested often but attracted few votes, while concrete, hands-on projects drew strong support. This gives us hope because people want to move from talking to doing.



Food is the big story. Growing it, sharing it and buying it locally, together drew more votes than anything else. The single most popular idea of the night was to create local food-swap and vegetable-growing initiatives, closely followed by buying local food and produce. Community gardens, shared allotments, growing lessons and better support for local producers all featured.

Energy comes next. Taken as a single theme, community energy and home improvements drew the most votes (54), led by the idea of investing together in renewable energy and using it locally. People suggested group-buying solar panels and heat pumps, solar on the village hall and church roof, and even power from the River Mole.

Nature and neighbours. Cleaning up the River Mole and joining and expanding the existing 4Bs Biodiversity Initiative each drew strong backing. So did a local emergency plan and a network to look out for vulnerable neighbours in heatwaves, cold snaps and floods, much as the villages did for each other during COVID.

The most popular ideas of the evening	Votes
Create local food-swap and vegetable-growing initiatives	12
Buy local food and produce	11
Continuous lobbying of our policy makers	9
Clean up the River Mole	8
Invest together in renewable energy and use it locally	8
Get involved in the 4Bs Biodiversity Initiative	8
Put together local emergency plans	7



A Starting Point for Collective Action

Adapting to a changing climate and adopting everyday living practices that help limit the extent of climate change are worthy and responsible things to try to do. But with the best intentions they are sometimes hard to achieve. By working together we can help each other and achieve things we cannot achieve by ourselves.

Our community conversation laid the foundations for collective action. But ideas only bring about change when people commit to act on them. The next step is to bring together those people who are willing to act at a meeting where activities and actions can be planned.

At our follow-up meeting on Monday 2 November, we hope to find people who are not just enthusiastic but who are willing to help lead our community to a better future. Through a collective planning process we will turn the strongest ideas into practical projects, each with people willing to lead it and a first step to take within weeks rather than years. The likely starting points are local food, community energy, looking after each other, nature and the River Mole, sustainable transport, preparing for extreme weather, and keeping up our collective voice. There will also be room for ideas we have not yet thought of. RE-Betchworth, our local climate and nature charity, is well

placed to provide a home for any new initiatives to emerge through the community action planning process.

Our Call to Action

Join us on Monday 2 November at 7pm, in Betchworth Village Hall. This is the meeting where ideas are turned into projects. Come along and leave with a group to join, a role that suits you and a first step to take before Christmas. You don't need to be an expert, only willing to do one thing.

We are looking for people to lead or co-lead each project: local food, community energy, looking after our neighbours, nature and the River Mole, and sustainable transport. If you can give a little time, there will be a job for you; if you can give more, please consider taking a lead.

Can't make Monday? Tell us which project you would like to help with by emailing admin@re-betchworth.org or registering at re-betchworth.org, and sign up for the RE-Betchworth newsletter to follow how each project gets on.

Bring someone who wasn't in the room. One of the clearest messages of the night was to reach beyond those who came. Share this report, bring a neighbour on Monday, or ask us to arrange a screening of the film for your street, club, school or congregation.

With thanks to everyone who came and took part in our climate change event, to the facilitators who helped stimulate discussion and to Mike Cock for running Mentimeter and preparing the results. The full report of the 26 October event "Community Voices" is available as a free download from the Betchworth Parish Council website [add link].

<https://betchworth-pc.gov.uk/climate-plan/>



The shape of things to come?



