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Survive or Thrive

Willington's Green Future: Our Responsibility and Opportunity to Act

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Willington, our beautiful community nestled in the heart of Cheshire, is home to roughly 300 neighbours who cherish the natural beauty and close-knit bonds we share. Yet we are not immune to the serious impacts of the climate and ecological crisis dominating our news.

Global scientists project a very challenging future, but together, we can make a real difference to the world our children and future generations are facing.

By understanding the climate and ecological emergency, we can take bold action to protect our community and planet.

As conservationist, humanitarian, and campaigner [Dr Jane Goodall](#) reminds us:

“What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make”

Understanding the Climate and Ecological Emergency

The climate and ecological emergency is a crisis that affects every corner of our world, including Willington. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently warned that without rapid and deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, we are on track to exceed the critical 1.5°C warming threshold. The majority of global scientists believe that we have already breached the Paris Agreement Target (see below). This would result in severe impacts on global ecosystems, including more frequent and intense weather events, rising sea levels, and significant disruptions to agriculture and biodiversity.

Recent Climate Data

According to the IPCC's 2023 report, the global surface temperature has increased by 1.09°C between 1850-1900 and 2011-2020. Furthermore, atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide are the highest they have been in at least 2 million years. [The United Nations projects that, without drastic action, we could see a temperature rise of 2.7°C by the end of this century, far exceeding safe limits.](#) This is not the world we want to leave our children and future generations.

Temperature Increases

[The World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\)](#) reported that 2023 was one of the hottest years on record, with global temperatures approximately 1.1°C above the pre-industrial average. This does not sound a lot, but the impact on the stability of our world is significant and every fraction of a degree counts.



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Carbon Dioxide Levels

[The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#) indicated that atmospheric CO2 levels reached 417.06 parts per million in 2023, the highest in recorded history.

Sea Level Rise

The IPCC reported that global sea levels rose about 3.7 mm per year between 2006 and 2018, primarily due to ice melt and thermal expansion of seawater.

Is it as bad as it sounds?

Damian Carrington's insightful, yet alarming report '[Hopeless and Broken](#)' highlights the growing despair among top climate scientists. They emphasise that climate change is happening faster and more intensely than predicted, urging immediate and substantial action to mitigate these effects.

How Will This Affect Our Community?

Cheshire West and Cheshire Council [declared a climate emergency in 2019](#), recognizing the urgent need for local action. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, with over 50% of biodiversity lost due to human activity, according to the BBC. This loss of biodiversity threatens the ecosystems that support life, making it essential for us to act now.

In Willington, we are already experiencing the effects of climate change. Unpredictable weather patterns, such as heavier rainfall and hotter summers, threaten our agriculture and natural landscapes. According to the [UK Climate Projections \(UKCP18\)](#), the likelihood of extreme weather events such as flooding could increase by 30% by 2050.

These changes could lead to food shortages, increased food prices, and potential flooding. Additionally, water scarcity and excessive heat waves are growing concerns that can impact our health and well-being. For instance, the UK Met Office reported that on July 22nd experienced the hottest day in over 100,000 years and [2023 was the hottest years on record](#), with temperatures exceeding 40°C in the UK for the first time.

Locally, Cheshire is seeing the effects of climate change through more frequent and severe flooding. The Environment Agency has noted that river levels in Cheshire are rising, increasing the risk of floods, which could affect homes, farms, and infrastructure in our community.



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Impact on Local Wildlife

Willington's natural environment is rich in wildlife, with many species dependent on our diverse habitats, including hedgerows, woodlands, and waterways. According to the [Cheshire Wildlife Trust](#), species such as the great crested newt, barn owl, and otter are just a few examples of local wildlife that could be affected by habitat loss and changing climate conditions.

The Cheshire Biodiversity Partnership reports that over 50% of the county's hedgerows have been lost in recent decades, impacting species that rely on these corridors for migration and nesting. Climate change further exacerbates these challenges by altering habitats and food availability. The warming temperatures and erratic weather patterns can disrupt breeding cycles and migration patterns, putting additional pressure on wildlife.

The Trust emphasizes the need to preserve local habitats and protect endangered species, as these efforts are crucial for maintaining the biodiversity that supports healthy ecosystems. Initiatives to plant more native trees, protect hedgerows, and restore wetlands can provide vital habitats for our wildlife and increase the resilience of our ecosystems.

What Can We Do About It?

Taking action at the local level can lead to significant change. Here are six steps we can all take to make a difference:

1. Improve Our Diet

Choosing plant-based options, even just a few times a week, can significantly reduce carbon emissions. According to the IPCC, shifting to plant-based diets can reduce food-related greenhouse gas emissions by up to 70%. The BBC reports that livestock farming contributes to 14.5% of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, highlighting the impact of our dietary choices.

2. Wildlife Conservation

[The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world](#), having lost over 50% of its biodiversity in recent decades. In the past 50 years, the UK has witnessed a significant decline in wildlife, with 41% of species studied showing a decrease in numbers. Preserving and restoring hedgerows and other natural habitats are essential to support biodiversity. The countryside is crucial for wildlife and acts as a natural carbon sink. Revitalising these ecosystems can help combat climate change and restore ecological balance. Initiatives such as No Mow May and avoiding hedge cutting between March and September are important.

3. Rethink Travel Choices

Walking, cycling, sharing car journeys, and using public transport can greatly reduce our carbon footprint. According to the Department for Transport, transport accounted for 24% of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2019. Air travel is one of the



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largest contributors to individual carbon emissions. For example, a single round-trip flight from London to New York generates about 1.6 metric tons of CO₂ per passenger, which is roughly the same as the average car emits in three months.

4. Choose Renewable Energy

Switching to a renewable energy tariff or installing renewable energy sources in your home can make a big impact. Organisations like [Power for People](#) help communities explore how to be more resilient with future energy supplies. There are over 300 successful community renewable energy projects in the UK, producing and distributing their own energy and building resilience.

5. Reduce Waste

The average UK household throws away around £700 worth of food each year, with much of it ending up in landfill. According to WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), the [UK generates around 9.5 million tonnes of food waste annually](#). Reducing waste through composting, recycling, and mindful consumption can help decrease this figure.

6. Buy Less, Buy Local, and Buy Ethical

Overconsumption is a significant problem, with [90% of consumer goods ending up in landfill within six months](#). Supporting local businesses and choosing ethical products can help reduce waste and support our community. The Circular Economy Institute states that shifting to a circular economy model could reduce global waste by up to 80%. [The UK will establish the world's first United Nations-backed International Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Resource Management in the Circular Economy](#). In Cheshire, local markets and farms provide excellent opportunities to support sustainable and ethical purchasing.

7. Bank Green

Understanding the impact of your money matters. Where you bank can have a profound impact on the environment. Choosing a bank that supports sustainable initiatives can be more impactful than both stopping flying and going vegan combined. [Bank.Green](#) provides insights into how banks contribute to climate change, helping you make informed decisions about where to keep your money. Switching to an ethical and sustainable bank can reduce your carbon footprint by up to 27 times more than other lifestyle changes, according to a 2020 report by Nordea Bank.

Additionally, consider growing your own vegetables and fruits, sharing the surplus with neighbours, and amplifying your voice by supporting initiatives like the [Climate and Nature Bill](#).



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Summary

The climate and ecological emergency is the greatest threat to our future and will affect everyone. From food shortages and price inflation to excessive heat and flooding, and drinking water shortages, these challenges require us to be proactive. But together, we can be better prepared and more resilient.

As Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

By taking courageous, committed action, we can ensure that Willington remains a beautiful, thriving community for generations to come.

Because if not us who, and if not now when?