

How Brixton Parish Council engages with the community on issues related to the environment and climate change



Brixton Parish Council acknowledges its privileged role as guardian of the environment for its community with landscapes heavily dominated by the ecologically important South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Yealm Estuary, Site of Special Scientific Interest (Steer Point to Cylinder Bridge) and the Plymouth Sound and Estuaries Special Area of Conservation, SAC, (Cofflete Creek from Brixton Torr to Steer Point). The Council has an Environment Policy and Action Plan (see Parish Council website) which is updated at least annually, taking into account the increasing knowledge and awareness of the continuing impact of climate change on the environment and the need for us all to take action. The Council has for many years been aware of climate change and its impact on the environment. Several individual projects have come under this remit. The Council uses a range of approaches to community engagement i.e. public meetings (face to face and Zoom), volunteers, promotion through village magazine, notice boards and Brixton Devon's website, social media etc.

In 2012 the Parish Council, was with parishioners, a founder member of the Brixton Community Composting Scheme; where residents can deposit their green waste at a site in the parish for recycling and in return can receive free compost. This is a well used community resource recognising the importance of reducing our carbon footprint through a sustainable community project. Income from the credits received from the local authority have furthered the cause of climate change and caring for the environment by providing free compost bins and water butts to parishioners over the years. This scheme is managed by a group of volunteers and the Council representative feeds back to the Council regularly. During the first 'lock down' of 2020 a supply of compost was deposited in the village providing safe and easy access for residents use. This resulted in less garden waste collected by the local authority and taken for processing out of the village and community driving less miles to source their compost and not buying small compost bags in plastic wrapping.

Brixton Parish Council is a 'Bee Friendly' Parish and signed up to the Year of Green Action in 2019. A wild flower bed of pollinating plants was created at one of the key junctions on the A379. Verge cutting has taken into account the need to allow wild flowers to develop their own natural habitat, providing greater food supplies for pollinating insects. The Council consulted with parishioners at Council meetings on the balance of promoting wildflowers with the welcoming appearance of the village all year round and a compromise reached. This compromise in future will need to swing in favour of the need to provide for pollinating insects and reducing grass cutting will save energy used to power machinery used. Prior to the pandemic a group of volunteers met monthly to sweep the streets and to improve the environment of the village, their feedback has been included in plans for improving the appearance of the village.

In 2019 the Council negotiated the purchase of the Old Mill site on the River Yealm at Cofflete Creek, part of the SAC and in the AONB as a community amenity. The purpose was to protect its environment from any development and providing awareness of the historical and ecological importance of the area and was the subject of public consultation on its purchase and future use. The first public meeting advertised by poster on Facebook, Council website and on notice boards described the proposed project to parishioners, and particularly those living in the hamlet of Torr to see if this was a project they would support in the long term. Following meetings with solicitors and the land owner, a further public consultation took place prior to the exchange of contracts to inform parishioners and engage them as volunteers in the continuing care and maintenance of the site.

Planning applications across the Parish, including those for the new town of Sherford, are published on the council website. Applications are carefully considered in line with the Parish Councils adopted Environmental Policy and in line with the environment and landscape objectives of the Brixton Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2034. Site meetings and the public open forum at Council meetings provide opportunities for parishioners to comment on environmental and climate change issues. Comments regarding biodiversity, energy efficiency, foul and surface water drainage etc are submitted to the Planning Authority through the planning consultation process. Local knowledge ensures that the risk to habitat or

possible loss to the environment are clearly identified. The Parish Council works closely with the AONB Team when considering planning applications in the AONB.

The Parish Council collaborates with the Sherford New Town Consortium and residents to ensure that planned green spaces and the countryside park for the new town reflect the Council's Environmental Policy.

All the public rights of way (PROWs) in the Parish are maintained to a high standard by Devon County Council Parish Paths Partnership (P3) ensuring safety and protection of wildlife is paramount. The PROWs are inspected by a team of volunteers on a quarterly basis who report to the annual Parish meeting with the Devon County Council Footpath Officer.

The Council signed up to Devon's Climate Declaration 25th September 2019 for the Climate Declaration and also signed up to become a Surfers against Sewage 'plastic free' community as part of Plastic Free Coastlines. An application was made to the local Town & Parish Fund for a grant to fund 2 events to promote and consult the community on becoming 'plastic free'. A well attended all age community consultation event was held in April 2019 in the village school. This resulted in increased awareness about plastic pollution in the marine environment and how litter picking and the general reduction of the daily use of single use plastic e.g. milk being delivered in glass bottles/or biodegradable packaging, avoiding the use of plastic bags, etc can reduce our impact on the marine environment. A further event scheduled for 2020 was overtaken by the pandemic. As a result of COVID-19 the remaining grant is now being used by the 2 primary schools in the parish for the children, with the help of a paid artist, to create external murals using plastic to promote 'plastic free' communities. This work will be completed and put on public display in 2021.

During 2020 residents brought their concerns to the Council about the water quality of the River Yealm following periods of high rainfall which resulted in the frequent discharge of raw sewage from the local treatment works into the river. The Council held a public meeting by zoom in January 2021 with presentations from the Environment Agency and South West Water. As a result a working group of the six parish councils on the River Yealm has been set up led by Brixton Parish Council. This group is starting to work with these agencies and others by zoom to address this particular water pollution locally with the planning authority and nationally through lobbying MP's to support Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill. Progress is regularly reported back to the Council.

Brixton Parish Council has joined an 'alliance' of 5 local parish councils Wembury, Yealmpton, Newton & Noss and Holbeton, - The Yealm Climate Emergency and Environment Action Network to positively address the climate emergency by reducing our carbon footprint on the environment and to improve the environment and biodiversity of the parish. The Council is also represented on South Hams Networking Climate & Biodiversity Group -Sustainable South Hams and Devon Climate Emergency Council Support Network led by Devon Communities Together. Issues identified from attending both of these groups are brought back to inform the Council to continue to raise awareness for people in the community to take action.

The Council meeting on the 24th February 2021 agreed to hold a public meeting by zoom to set up a Climate Change Emergency Planning and Environment Group to implement the Councils Environment Policy and Action Plan and to hear ideas on how to progress the plan, consider other ideas and listen to community voices. This public consultation was originally intended for 2020 but was postponed due the pandemic and took place on the 22nd April attended by 15 residents. An action plan will take ideas forward, raising awareness through local village magazine, Face book etc about how individuals can adapt their lifestyles to reduce their carbon emissions and contribute to the improvement of wildlife habitats and environment. This group will continue to meet by zoom as an open group inviting parishioners to continue to have a say in the development and progress of the plan. In March 2021 a parishioner was nominated to represent the Council on the River Yealm Estuary to Moor (YEM) Wildlife Corridor a project promoted by Yealm Community Energy.