



the NEWS

Bradford on Avon Town Council
Autumn 2020



Eco-emergency declared

An Ecological Emergency has been declared by Bradford on Avon Town Council. The decision follows on from last year's declaration of a Climate Emergency, in recognition of the urgent need for action to negate climate change and its effects, both locally and globally.

Environment & Planning Committee members agreed that the original declaration did not accurately reflect the catastrophic impact that humans are having on the planet's ecology as outlined in the 2019 State of Nature Report. Deputy Mayor Cllr Alex Kay and Leader of the Council, Cllr Dom Newton, therefore proposed that the declaration be extended to one of Climate and Ecological Emergency; this was unanimously agreed at a committee meeting held in July.

Cllr Kay said: "I am delighted to further our commitment to the environment by passing this resolution. The declaration of an Ecological Emergency supports action for wildlife and their habitats, irrespective of carbon emissions. Flourishing biodiversity is a strong indication of clean air and water, whilst climate and ecology are intrinsically linked.

"With a number of green spaces already owned by the Town Council, and more to be transferred from Wiltshire Council very soon, it is hoped that managing these to redress any ecological damage while enhancing biodiversity will also be beneficial to the health and wellbeing of the community and that of future generations."

Cllr Dom Newton added: "While appreciating and interacting with the natural world is undeniably enjoyable, protecting it is critical, for without it humans cannot exist. We must now work to establish a healthier, symbiotic and thriving relationship with our local ecology which in turn will hopefully inspire others to do the same."

Leading the way on biodiversity



■ Ecosulis surveying species present at Barton Farm Meadow

The Town Council has adopted a biodiversity policy - following on from its declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency - including the appointment of a local company to carry out an in-depth survey that will act as a benchmark against which to monitor future progress. The policy, adopted in June, bans the use of glyphosate and other chemical weed-killers, as well as peat-based compost, in council-managed locations and contracts. It also requires that mowing and cutting programmes be reassessed, with an emphasis on promoting natural biodiversity as far as possible, in line with local eco-systems.

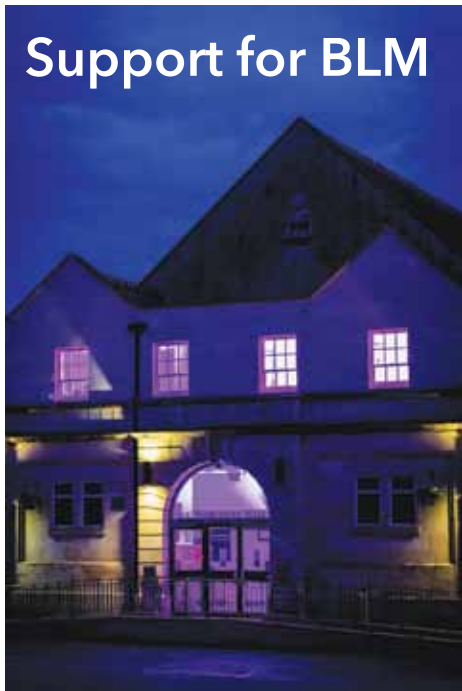
Cllr Alex Kay said: "We're fortunate that many areas of the town are already really rich in biodiversity - and how wonderful it is to regularly see kingfishers, wild orchids and bats in their habitats. The purpose of the survey is to understand how we can connect those richer areas, and develop more, so that wildlife can prosper more widely." Following proposals from a number of



■ While the pandemic forced the temporary closure of Barton Farm play area, we let it grow wild for a while, to the benefit of wildlife. When the time came to reopen, we left four areas for children to investigate and enjoy. These small patches are marked with blue hearts, and are already teeming with interesting things to look at. To find out more about the benefits of 'rewilding' small areas to encourage biodiversity and learning, visit <https://www.facebook.com/bluecampaignhub/> and perhaps even consider creating one in your garden or workplace.

specialist contractors, local company Ecosulis was appointed to carry out the survey. Managing Director Cain Blyth said: "With this contract the Town Council have shown a great commitment to nature restoration and supporting a community that is already highly engaged in improving Bradford on Avon's green spaces. We anticipate significant benefits for residents, visitors and local wild nature in the coming years."

Photos: Lydia Booth Photography



Support for BLM

St Margaret's Hall and Westbury Garden were bathed in purple light in June, as the Town Council showed its solidarity with those affected by the murder of George Floyd by police in the US. Mayor Simon McNeill-Ritchie noted that staying silent in the face of racism is unacceptable - reflecting on the nationwide demonstrations in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

This simple act of lighting the two prominent locations in purple had a direct and positive impact, with members of the local minority community subsequently coming forward to share experiences and discuss changes that could be embraced by the Town Council and wider community. This led to several meetings between representatives of the community and the Leader of the Council, and a commitment, supported by a council resolution in July, to facilitate a diversity forum, commission diversity training for council staff, volunteers and councillors, and to review all council processes to ensure that diversity is not only recognised, but actively promoted.

A forum member said: "What we need is support and action. We know there's a problem and we now need to take action to make others aware. And it does need to come from those in power."

Cllr McNeill-Ritchie added: "It's important that those of us with the power to change things, to address issues of prejudice and discrimination, do so - to stay silent is to be complicit; to fail to act is to perpetuate."

Further meetings are planned over the coming months, and we encourage people from the whole community, particularly those directly impacted by prejudice, to get involved: sharing ideas and actively engaging in promoting inclusivity.

Bringing out the best

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown posed huge challenges to people across our community, with some experiencing unforeseen economic pressures for the first time in their lives, and the very real prospect of not being able to put food on the table, having to negotiate Universal Credit or claim free school meals. For some, support was available, but for those who slipped through the net, our wonderful community stepped in to fill the gaps.

Businesses including Christine's Sustainable Supermarket, which, at time of writing had raised almost £5,000 for food parcels, Il Ponte and others stepped in to provide food to those in need. The Hub has worked across the whole community, supporting families with school-age children, and other more vulnerable people, with hundreds of food boxes. These efforts have been supported by the community as whole, with the Town Council Covid-19 Response Fund raising a further £6,000 to supplement projects as and when required.

One stand-out scheme, exemplifying resilience and self-help, was featured on the Town Council website back in May. The Floaty Boat Fund (FBF) was started in 2018 by boaters, with the aim of preventing people living aboard canal boats reaching crisis point, as well as enhancing the relationship between boaters and canal-side communities, including in Bradford on Avon.

Covid-19 has placed huge pressure on this community in particular. High rates of self-employment, including a significant proportion in the Arts industries, meant many were facing financial hardship, coupled with the increased challenges of living aboard narrow craft.

Linking up with the Hub, the FBF set up a food box scheme with a unique 'pay it forward' element. When purchasing boxes, boaters could also give a little extra to help those in the community who needed more support. The project assisted dozens of individual boaters and families, providing much-needed support along the local stretch of the canal and beyond.

Familiar faces re-elected for 2020



■ Leader of the Council Dom Newton, Mayor Simon McNeill-Ritchie and Deputy Mayor Alex Kay pictured in Westbury Garden

Councillors recently voted members into annually appointed Town Council positions, after a short delay due to the need to focus on the Covid-19 response.

Cllr Simon McNeill-Ritchie, who also chairs the Town Development Committee, was elected as Mayor for a second consecutive year. He said: "I would like to thank my fellow councillors for the rare honour of electing me to a second consecutive term and Cllr Dan Taylor in addition for his support as Deputy Mayor over the past year."

Cllr Alex Kay - chair of the Environment

& Planning Committee and a former Mayor and Deputy Mayor - was elected as Deputy Mayor.

Cllr Dom Newton was elected as Leader of the Council for the fourth consecutive year. He said: "I am honoured that members have supported my continuing as Leader of the Council during this very challenging time in our town, and as we head into the final year of the current administration." Full Council is now meeting monthly to handle major decisions, while additional ad hoc meetings are being called where necessary to support officers in their legal duties.

Scheme backs local business

A new 'Shop Local' scheme has been launched enabling businesses to make exclusive offers available to residents and visitors wanting to support local shops and businesses.

Over the summer, the Town Council has been developing the Shops & Businesses section of the Explore Bradford on Avon website, while also encouraging participating businesses to register offers with our new Shop Local scheme. You can now collect your card and start saving at over 25 businesses across the community!

The #ShopLocal scheme offers wallet-sized cards which entitle holders to take advantage of bespoke offers made by participating businesses.

You can find out about current offers via the Explore Bradford on Avon website page: <https://www.bradfordonavon.co.uk/boa-shop-local-card/offers-and-discounts/>

Residents and visitors to the town can collect #ShopLocal cards from the Tourist Information Centre, participating businesses and the Town Council office.

The aim is to encourage interest in special offers but also awareness of and spending at local businesses as a whole, which is ultimately good for the whole community and of course your carbon footprint!

You can find Shop Local discounts, introductory offers and free gifts with



■ Marni Poole at Dible & Roy Interiors, which is offering 10 per cent off all non-sale furnishings and giftware as part of the Shop Local scheme; inset, the new #ShopLocal card

many different businesses across Bradford on Avon.

Leader of the council, Cllr Dom Newton, said: "Over lockdown, many of us realised, perhaps for the first time, what was on offer in our town. The #ShopLocal card is a way of continuing to improve that relationship, and help those businesses stay afloat - while allowing everyone, whether resident or visitor, to explore and enjoy the town that little bit more."

You can register your shop or business (BA15 1 or 2 postcodes only) FREE - just fill out the registration form at www.bradfordonavon.co.uk/local-shops-and-businesses



Shining a light

Do you know someone who has made a real difference to the community in 2020? If so, nominate them to be this year's Shining Light of BOA! Two winners - one adult and one child under 16 - will press the button that lights up the town at the annual Christmas lights switch-on. To nominate visit: <https://www.bradfordonavon.co.uk/shining-light/>

Thanks to all for support in crisis

A message from Leader of the Council, Cllr Dom Newton

Following on from my update in the last Newsletter, I wanted to briefly write to you again to say a further 'thank you' to you all, and in particular to the Community Emergency Volunteers, street champions and other volunteers who have played such a vital role in supporting our community during lockdown.

As a Town Council, we have supported well over 1,000 individual requests for assistance - and this doesn't even include the many requests that will have been supported by volunteers after initial contact via the Town Council. This is an immense effort by the town. Town Councillors are joined by the local MP in expressing our heartfelt thanks to the whole community for this response.

The effort is not over - while there is clearly a return to a level of normality, we also know that there is still a real health risk from Covid-19, and we remain prepared to respond in the event of a local resurgence. Council leaders and senior officers continue to meet throughout the week to monitor the situation and address concerns. We are starting, through projects like the #ShopLocal card, social recovery programme, and similar initiatives, to address getting 'back to normal' in a way that maintains and builds on the resilience the town has shown so far, while we also learn how to manage council-operated venues, places and spaces in a safe way.

We have also taken the decision to invest Town Council money

in measures to promote social distancing across the centre of the town, to keep people safe both from the risk of Covid-19, and from passing vehicles on our pavements and the town bridge.

Challenges remain: the ubiquity of face masks will make some uncomfortable, though will hopefully provide a great deal of added safety and reassurance. Others may face new or continued economic hardship as a result of business lockdown guidelines or changes to their employment.

We cannot address every issue - but we remain committed to doing the best we can to support our community through whatever lies ahead.

Back-to-school workshops go beyond lockdown

Bradford on Avon Town Council commissioned a series of workshops over the summer aimed at helping young people prepare for a return to classroom schooling in September, supporting their emotional wellbeing and self-esteem.

The online workshops - called 'Beyond Lockdown' - used drama and poetry to help attendees explore and voice their feelings and emotions in a safe way. Research has consistently shown that this type of approach has a positive impact on health and wellbeing: particularly important given the huge challenges facing young people following the extended period away from school.

The project - funded by the Town Council-administered Colonel William Llewellyn Palmer Education Charity (CWPLEC) - was the first in a series of three projects, jointly funded by a Town Council grant, which will take place over the coming months.

The further two projects will aim to include classroom-based sessions within St Laurence School from September, targeting young people who may be struggling, as well as an

intergenerational project bringing younger and older people together to work through feelings of social isolation and loneliness during lockdown.

The programme also includes support for a Breakfast Literacy Club at Fitzmaurice Primary School - to directly support academic needs for children who have not had access to home schooling during lockdown.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Dom Newton said: "We know that lockdown has had a major impact on some young people in the town, and this project is aimed at addressing some of the needs arising from that. In speaking to youth service providers and schools, it's clear that there will be issues around school refusal, readjusting to a changed social situation, and academic stress around exams that have been missed or will now be taken having missed six months of school.

"We hope that the workshops also contribute to the growing body of evidence to support the need for access to arts in education as part of emotional growth and well-being in young people".

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A series of four 'Come Back Later' posters, two of which are reproduced here, were commissioned by the Town Council during lockdown with the aim of encouraging visitors to return to the town once lockdown was eased. The poster taglines will now be adapted to allow the TIC to sell them as posters and merchandise as the town looks to welcome people back.



Tourism office reopens for business

The Explore BoA Tourist Information Centre has reopened, having been closed since March due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The centre was already undergoing some updates, but the closure provided an opportunity to give the space a facelift and implement safety improvements to allow for social distancing and to keep volunteers and

visitors as safe as possible.

Steph Shearing, the Town Council's Tourism & Events Officer, said: "We are really pleased to have reopened with a new range of gifts and souvenirs, a card payment machine and of course the ever popular duck food, sold in handy compostable bags! There are so many great ways to Explore BoA: from treasure trails to help keep kids

entertained, through to historical tours, Lost Lanes bike routes and stunning walks.

"So whether you are holidaying in Bradford on Avon, directing guests to discover what the town has to offer, or already live here and are looking for new things to do, pop by and say hello!"



Visit our website at www.bradfordonavontowncouncil.gov.uk