

Swale Borough Council

Motion to declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency

Council notes:

1. Humans have already caused irreversible climate change by burning fossil fuels. Carbon emissions result from both production and consumption. Atmospheric CO₂ levels are above 400 parts per million (ppm). This far exceeds the 350 ppm that scientists believe to be a safe level for humanity.¹
1. Global temperatures have increased by 1 degree Celsius from pre-industrial levels.² The impacts of climate change are being felt around the world. Above 1.5°C, the risks to humanity of floods, droughts, and extreme heat become much greater leading to increased poverty and mass migration. At current levels, the world is on course for 3°C of warming by the later part of this century. Once this is reached, there is the risk of accelerated change, as the consequences of climate change (e.g. rainforest destruction) themselves cause further change. Above 4°C, everywhere south of Paris would be uninhabitable.^{3, 4}
2. Swale is vulnerable to the effects of climate breakdown; the highest temperature ever recorded in the UK was recorded at Faversham (38.5°C)⁵; Swale is an area of serious water stress and is already vulnerable to tidal, and surface water flooding⁶.
3. Air pollution produced by burning fossil fuels is associated with a number of adverse health impacts, particularly for the most vulnerable in society, including children, older people and those with heart and lung conditions^{7, 8}.
4. There is an unprecedented and accelerating rate of species extinction, with up to one million species threatened with extinction, many within decades. The rate of global species extinction is tens to hundreds of times faster than the average rate over the last 10 million years, and is accelerating⁹.
5. Five species of butterfly have disappeared from Kent in the past 50 years, three more butterfly species are on the brink of extinction from the county. Since 1980 the rate of plant extinctions in Kent has accelerated with an average of four species per decade vanishing from Kent. Birds and wildflowers continue to suffer population declines. The county's once abundant native oyster beds have been reduced to small pockets and

¹ <https://sustainabilityadvantage.com/2014/01/07/co2-why-450-ppm-is-dangerous-and-350-ppm-is-safe/>

² <https://climateanalytics.org/briefings/global-warming-reaches-1c-above-preindustrial-warmest-in-more-than-11000-years/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/18/climate-crisis-heat-is-on-global-heating-four-degrees-2100-change-way-we-live>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/09/tipping-points-could-exacerbate-climate-crisis-scientists-fear>

⁵ <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/climate-extremes/#?tab=climateExtremes>

⁶ http://www2.swale.gov.uk/media/adobe/pdf/k%2Fd%2FWater_Topic_Paper_10_with_cover.pdf

⁷ <https://www.who.int/airpollution/ambient/health-impacts/en/>

⁸ <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/air-pollution/effects>

⁹ <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>

farmed stocks, there are clear declines in commercial fish species and recent local extinctions are being recorded¹⁰.

6. Loss of habitat and changes in land use are major causes of declines in Kent. If habitats are fragmented and isolated it is difficult for species to recolonize even when sites are brought into sympathetic management. It is essential that suitable areas are linked together so that wildlife can spread between them.
7. That the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on *Global Warming of 1.5°C* finds that limiting global warming to 1.5°C requires “rapid and far-reaching” transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport and cities. Global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) would need to fall by 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching ‘net zero’ around 2050.¹¹
8. Unfortunately, our current plans and actions are not enough. The world is on track to overshoot the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C limit before 2050.^{12, 13}
9. Individuals cannot be expected to make this reduction on their own. Society needs to change its laws, taxation, and infrastructure to make low carbon living easier.
10. Swale Borough Council has shown leadership and readiness to work in partnership when it comes to addressing the issue of climate breakdown, having signed the Nottingham Declaration in 2007 and Climate Local in 2012, and having developed and participated in projects aimed at reducing carbon emissions and adapting to a rise in global temperature, including the Rushenden Retrofit and Sustainable Sheppey programmes.
11. Regional and local councils around the world are responding by declaring a ‘climate emergency’ and committing resources to address this emergency.¹⁴

Council believes that:

1. All governments (national, regional and local) have a duty to limit the negative impacts of climate breakdown and species extinction. Local governments recognise this should not wait for their national governments to change policies. It is important for the residents of Swale and the UK that councils commit to carbon neutrality and take steps to protect biodiversity as quickly as possible.
2. The consequences of global temperature rising above 1.5°C are so severe that preventing this from happening must be humanity’s number one priority.
3. Bold action can deliver economic benefits and improved wellbeing for local people. For example, insulating homes will reduce the number of households in fuel poverty and provide skilled jobs; improved public transport will lead to fewer car journeys, create jobs and reduce social exclusion in rural areas; encouraging the switch to zero-emission electric vehicles will improve air quality; walking and cycling encourages a healthy, active lifestyle; protecting our wild places and providing access to nature

¹⁰ <https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/more-one-ten-uk-species-threatened-extinction>

¹¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/> ;

https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/SR15_SPM_version_report_LR.pdf

¹² <https://www.wri.org/blog/2018/10/8-things-you-need-know-about-ipcc-15-c-report>

¹³ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

¹⁴ <https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/climate-emergency-declarations-cover-15-million-citizens/>

promotes good physical and mental health; while protection of pollinators is essential for our crops to grow.

4. Single-use plastics are a wasteful use of fossil fuels and a threat to nature.

Council resolves:

1. To declare a 'Climate and Ecological Emergency'.
2. To draw up an action plan with improvement in energy efficiency and making space for nature as key priorities in all strategies and plans.
3. Pursue the Swale Strategic Air Quality Action Plan 2018-22 and to actively lobby all responsible authorities to improve air quality within Swale.
4. To provide leadership by taking all measures within our control to make Swale Borough Council's own operations carbon neutral by 2025, taking into account both production and consumption emissions (scope 1, 2 and 3).¹⁵
5. To engage with businesses, organisations and residents to facilitate the action required to make the Borough of Swale carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions (scope 1, 2 and 3).
6. To undertake actions including, but not be limited to, spatial and transport planning to make fewer journeys necessary, improvement to the energy efficiency of new and existing housing and buildings, improved public transport especially in rural areas; encouraging active transport, developing the infrastructure for EVs; deploying renewable energy at every opportunity, while continuing to safeguard our wild places, ancient woodlands and hedgerows.
7. To call on Westminster to provide the powers and resources to make the 2030 target possible.
8. To call upon the MPs for Sittingbourne & Sheppey and for Faversham & Mid Kent to support this motion.
9. To work with other governments (both within the UK and internationally) to determine and implement best practice methods to limit global warming to less than 1.5°C.
10. To work with partners across the Borough to deliver these new goals through all relevant strategies and plans.
11. To become a 'Plastic-Free Council' by eliminating single-use plastics from the Council's operations, whenever possible, by 2021.
12. To request the Cabinet, working through the Policy Development and Review Committee, to report the actions the Council will take to address this emergency to Full Council by the end of the 2019/20 municipal year.

¹⁵ <https://www.carbontrust.com/resources/faqs/services/scope-3-indirect-carbon-emissions/>