

Glastonbury Town Council have declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and are responding by committing to making their activities carbon neutral by 2030.

What is the Emergency?

To survive, humanity and all other beings depend on a thriving natural world and a stable climate. We need clean air, water and soil, resources, and land. We also need each other, cooperation, kindness, and creativity to meet our struggles together.

There is growing evidence that this vital natural support system is under serious threat, because of our own activities. In 2020, WWF reported that:

“globally, the average population size of mammals, fish, birds, reptiles and amphibians has declined by 68% since 1970. Over the past decades human activities have destroyed and degraded forests, grasslands, wetlands and other important ecosystems, threatening human well-being. 75% of the Earth’s ice-free land surface has already been significantly altered, most of the oceans are polluted, and 90% of wetland area has been lost.”

These tragic losses are because for many decades humans have demanded more resources than the earth can regenerate, leaving nature weaker each year. Ecosystems are under additional pressure from changes in temperature and rainfall, extreme weather events, wildfires, and other growing threats. Around one billion people are at risk because of climate change, with low-income communities being the most vulnerable.

What has carbon dioxide got to do with this?

Carbon dioxide is the most common of several gases that are referred to as greenhouse gases. When they build up in the atmosphere, they trap heat close to the earth, in the way that glass in a greenhouse does. Life on earth relies on this warmth and the dynamic balance that it brings to the climate.

Carbon dioxide levels have naturally fluctuated over millennia. However, levels in the atmosphere today are now dramatically higher than at any point in the past 800,000 years. Over the past 60 years, atmospheric carbon dioxide has increased about 100 times faster than any previous natural increases. The balance that life on earth relies on is dangerously tipped.

How do we know this is caused by humans?

A few people still think that these changes are part of the natural rhythm of the planet. There is a relationship between global temperature changes, and natural factors such as solar activity, volcanos, aerosols and land use. However, since the industrial revolution, the influence of natural factors is dwarfed by the influence of rising greenhouse gas emissions on observed temperatures.

Around three quarters of our emissions are the result of burning fossil fuels for energy used in buildings, industry, and transport. Fossil fuel companies have known about the dangerous impact of their industry for decades and are desperate to protect their business model. They have been funding disinformation campaigns that falsely suggests the science is not yet

settled. This is why we don't see it shouted about in the mainstream press or in political debate. It is also not understood by the general public, despite 97% of climate scientists agreeing that climate change is caused by humans. This deliberate campaign to undermine action is already causing the deaths of thousands of people and making millions homeless.

A well-functioning democracy depends on a well-informed public. People have a right to be accurately informed. But if the public are being misinformed by people who deny climate science, that has social and environmental consequences. The issue of climate science denial is controversial and inspires a lot of emotions.

(John Cook, <https://skepticalscience.com>)

How did we get here?

Did we choose this as individuals? Sixty years ago, most people walked or cycled to work, but now after massive road building and industrialisation most people are dependent on a car. Why are we so attached to our cars? Did we as individuals choose this life of long drives, traffic jams and polluted air? A world where every day in the UK five people are killed and 84 are seriously injured on the roads? Or did the politicians, car manufacturers, road builders, and oil industry beneficiaries, build these systems that we are trapped within?

So how do we change things?

As individuals, we can choose personal change, but we may not feel safe walking and cycling on roads dominated by cars, or have access to public transport? So, it's important to change the systems too, so that we and others have better alternatives.

So, does that mean we all have to be locked up in those evil 15-minute cities?

"We need to make cities for walking, for having more medical services, educational activities, for the needs of our daily tasks, to make cities liveable," says Carlos Moreno, a professor at Paris's Sorbonne University who has been credited with developing the concept. We all love the idea of more liveable neighbourhoods, and this is where system change could improve life particularly for lower income communities. But somehow, stories of climate lockdowns, fines and restrictions have been fabricated to scare people into campaigning against the very system changes that will make their lives better ... hmmm... I wonder whose interest that might be serving?

How is Glastonbury Town Council responding?

In our response to the climate and ecological emergency, we have looked at what others are doing, and at reports that set out the scale of what is needed. The government has not even kept the commitments made in its unambitious 'Net Zero' policy. And despite claiming to be a world leader, the UK is nowhere near achieving sufficient cuts in emissions to prevent climate collapse. In 2021, we reviewed the document *Absolute Zero*, which sets out what is technically feasible and necessary for the UK to cut emissions sufficiently. The wide system changes that it describes must scare the oil companies and billionaire press. Because groups of misinformed people have been persuaded to campaign against it, even though there is no sign that the UK government has acted on it in any way.

Glastonbury Town Council is committed to reducing its carbon emissions, and to building resilience, focussing on reducing running costs and making the town better for everyone. We have identified five areas of work:

1. **REDUCE – take less, give more.**
2. **DECARBONISE – use clean machines where appropriate.**
3. **SUPPORT NATURE – protect and restore the home we share with all beings.**
4. **INFLUENCE – offer support and stories.**
5. **ADAPT – be ready, be kind.**

And what have we achieved so far?

Over the past two years, we have switched energy supplier to Ecotricity; replaced our exhausted old diesel van with a second hand electric one; replaced our broken 60 year old boiler with a new more efficient one. We expect these simple actions to:

- Cut our annual carbon emissions by 39%.
- Cut related running costs by £4,000 per year.
- Improve air quality in the town.
- Provide encouragement to others trying to cut emissions.

But Glastonbury Town Council isn't only focussed on carbon. It is also working to make Glastonbury a safer, happier, healthier place for everyone, by reducing waste, protecting nature, spreading the word, and preparing for future challenges ... we have been:

- Restoring and protecting nature – By planting trees and hedges, and supporting community planting projects such as Fisher's Hill Community Garden, GTC are helping to make the town greener, and healthier.
- Saving water - The rainwater collection tanks used to water much of the planting, save water, and also help to prevent flooding.
- Reducing resource use, by mostly switching from paper to digital documents, which also makes better use of staff time.
- Supporting community groups – Glastonbury Town Council, together with its Climate & Ecological Emergency Advisory Committee (CEEAC), have been responsible for an astounding range of community-based activities, helping to make the town safer, healthier and happier: litter picking, repair café, community fridge, bus campaign group, walking and cycling campaigns, support for local food growers. The CEEAC produce a regular newsletter and have an information stall at the Tuesday market.
- Feeling part of a diverse community that is an Earth Protector Town.

So, what's next?

While cutting carbon emissions by 39% is a good start, GTC still have a lot of work to do to reach carbon neutral by 2030. And, in their role to serve the people of Glastonbury, everything they plan to do must also reduce waste, save money, protect the natural world, support community projects, and help everyone to prepare for the changes that lie ahead. This will include:

- Town Hall improvements – A retrofit plan, insulation, double glazed windows, ventilation, and zoning the heating system.
- Appropriate technology – Solar panels, EV chargers, energy management.

Glastonbury Town Council - Climate Emergency & Resilience report

- Supporting nature – More tree, hedge and wildflower planting, encouraging food growing including allotments, peat restoration.
- Community events – Sharing experience and knowledge and supporting projects.
- Building resilience – Emergency plans, practical and emotional support groups.

In summary

- Climate change is real. It is happening now and everywhere and is proving to be much worse than we were told.
- Net Zero doesn't go far enough, and governments are not even anywhere near the pathetic targets that they set for themselves.
- We should be aiming for Real Zero.
- As individuals we need to make personal changes, and we also need to drive system change.
- The oil companies have driven misinformation and are spreading climate science denial through the manipulation of well-meaning people.
- Just Stop Oil.
- Build resilience.
- Do what you can, with what you have, where you are, now. (Jem Bendell)

If you want to know more, or have ideas and questions, please contact Melissa Taylor, GTC's Climate Emergency & Resilience Officer climate@glastonbury.gov.uk

Visit GTC's website page dedicated to the Climate Emergency & Resilience:

<https://glastonbury.gov.uk/council/committees/glastonbury-climate-emergency-resilience/>

Join the Climate & Ecological Emergency Advisory Committee Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/751382626396387>

Climate collapse is a worrying topic. It is natural and normal to feel anxiety, sorrow, and anger about the losses that we face. If you have been disturbed by anything discussed here, please talk to someone, or seek support: <https://glastonburymentalhealth.org>
<https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org>