



Flitwick Town Council

Environmental Improvement Working Group (EIWG)

Environmental sustainability, driven by Town Council Strategy and Policy

The Town Council's latest Strategy was adopted in June 2021. It set out the Council's vision for the Town, its aims and priorities over a period of 4 years.

Included within the vision was the Council's clear commitment to building the success of a 'sustainable' Flitwick, specifically through:

1. Improve the quality of the public realm, responding to climate change issues and protecting the local environment.
2. By acting both as an organisation whose business activities impact on the environment, leading by example to minimise any adverse impact. Secondly, by working with the community and other partners to help make the town environment more sustainable.

This commitment developed into the Council's first 'Environmental' policy adopted in January 2022.

Flitwick Town Council Environmental Policy.

Flitwick Town Council recognises that its operations have some impact on the Environment in several ways and is committed to identifying, monitoring and reducing such impacts. In addition, its duties enable it to protect and at times enhance the local environment both directly and by influencing others. The Council will make best use of its position and powers to do this.

- The Council acknowledges its duty to consider the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out its functions under the provisions of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, s40.
- The policy supports the aims of the Council's Strategy and be linked to other Council Policies including Equality; Community & Social; Investment and Procurement, which will ensure environmental considerations are central to the ethos of the organisation.
- The Council embrace the concept of sustainability and acknowledge the need to reconcile environmental, social and economic demands.
- The Council will undertake periodic audits to ensure up to date assessments of environmental impacts are maintained and the progress of Action Plans are monitored. As part of this it will measure the organisation's carbon footprint and take the necessary actions to reduce it. Reviewed through analysis of the Council's carbon footprint.
- The Council will ensure that Councillors and employees receive training to enable them to understand and control the environmental effects of their work reviewed through the environmental awareness and education audit.

- The Council will comply with all relevant legislation and where possible set standards which are more stringent than the legal minimum.
- The Council will require where appropriate, its suppliers to provide environmental assessments of their environmental impacts and life cycle analysis of major products. Reviewed through a positive purchasing audit.
- The Council have regard for both the natural and built environments and will strive to protect and where possible enhance them. Reviewed through the land management audit.
- The Council is not a large energy user but will take any opportunity to manage energy with a view to minimising its consumption. Reviewed through an energy audit.
- The Council will ensure its operations minimise pollution of land, water and air.
- The Council will seek to minimise waste, re-use or recycle where possible and ensure disposal has the minimum environmental impact. Reviewed through a waste management audit.
- The Council will direct its efforts to make the Town sustainable, through like-minded Community Groups. Reviewed through an environmental awareness and education audit.

The Environmental Audit Advocates Community Engagement

The Council, as a community leader, is well placed to help shape the local Flitwick environment towards a more environmentally sustainable future.

The current Environmental Audit (2023) highlighted the opportunity to set up an environmental improvement group to report directly to the council on areas and projects where more 'sustainable' options could be considered for investment and on opportunities to reduce its overall carbon emissions.

Using the Planning Improvement Working Group as a model

Having successfully replaced in 2021 the previous 'Council Planning Committee' with a community engagement group which includes a mix of Councillors and members of the public, we have a working model on which to base an 'environmental' equivalent.

However, 'planning' is a fairly well-defined area, whereas the scope of what might be viewed as coming under the umbrella as 'environmental' is far wider.

So, what sort of areas could the group look at:

1. **Energy** - to reduce energy demand, improve energy efficiency and convert to renewable, low or zero carbon technologies for energy and heat.
2. **Transport** - to promote walking, cycling and public transport. Accelerating the move to Council owned electric vehicles and development of public EV charging points.
3. **Land** – to achieve sustainable land management.
4. **General Waste Reduction** - establishing a 'Reduce, Reuse, Re-cycle' mentality to council operations and services and in the wider town.

5. **Food Waste Reduction** - Projects like the 'Community Fridge' and 'Food Poverty' reduction.
- A. **Community Engagement** - improving local resident and business involvement in practical projects like litter picking, tree planting and re-wilding. Consideration could also be given to the creation of 'Green Champions' amongst Councillors and staff to take on responsibility for actively advocating for change in particular areas.

Environmental Improvement Working Group Role and Responsibilities

The working group will be a working group of the Town Council.

The Council will set the terms of reference and membership for the working group.

The working group will have no delegated authority, no budget and will make recommendations back to the Town Council.

The benefits of having a working group which reports into the full town council would be the opportunity for other council committees to refer potential projects to it, enabling a more consistent and comprehensive approach to 'environmental activities'.

Membership

Up to 8 Councillors and up to 8 members of the public.

Council Members will be elected at the annual statutory meeting in May of each year.

Public participation will be achieved through advertising or word of mouth.

It would be envisioned that the EIWG would be able to call on the experience, guidance and advice of other third party local or national organisations when dealing with particular projects or issues.

Terms of Reference

When exercising its functions in relation to environmental and sustainability proposals, the working group will:

- Evaluate the benefits and drawbacks to the proposals that they make, investigating high level costs, where relevant.
- Pro-actively engage with appropriate individuals, as well as local and national organisations, in order to establish background information, expert guidance, relevant legislation and potential funding routes.
- Proceed in a manner that is evidence-led, collecting its own relevant evidence where applicable and feasible.
- Pro-actively engage where possible with residents through means available to it.
- Develop a co-ordinated plan to support sustainable and environmentally driven actions which can either be implemented directly by the Town Council, or where there is an opportunity for the Council to influence decision makers e.g. Central Beds Council.

In relation to initiating investigation of potential initiatives the Environmental Action Group will:

- Engage in a positive, open, and transparent manner, using an understanding of the Council's high-level priorities contained in either its Environmental Policy or following on from information contained within the latest Council Environmental Audit.
- Seek to bring forward and recommend opportunities that will benefit residents in the town and are consistent with the Town Council's Strategy.

Recommendations:

1. Agree to form an Environmental Improvement Working Group as part of the post 2023 Council Election Process based on the above terms of reference.
2. Ensure that a maximum of 8 Councillors are elected as part of the annual Committee and Working Group election process.
3. Promote the formation and role of the group to residents, in order to encourage people to come forward to be part of the group.
4. Ensure those residents wishing to put themselves forward for permanent membership of the group are formally confirmed as Committee members and are replaced as churn requires.