

Budget speech

Two days ago, the Chief executive of the Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan, stressed that the climate emergency is already hitting “worst case scenario” levels that if left unchecked will lead to the collapse of ecosystems, with dire consequences for humanity.

He referred particularly to extreme weather and flooding worst case scenarios which have already been occurring over recent years.

He urged politicians to take action to reduce emissions and adapt to the “**inevitable**” impacts of the climate emergency.

He warned in no uncertain terms that we must put the same effort into tackling the “unseen pandemic” of the climate emergency as into the fight against COVID to mitigate the catastrophic effects of the Climate crisis.

He warned: “**We will get the environment we pay for, we will get the climate we work for.**”

Looking at the current budget with a mere £250k allocated for green projects/the Climate emergency, my heart sinks thinking about the environment we will have left in Spelthorne if we don't act NOW and treat this threat with the seriousness it requires.

And other Councils are taking the Climate Emergency seriously:

- (1) Folkestone and Hythe (a Tory/LibDem/Green/Independent coalition) declared a Climate emergency in 2019 and set a budget aside of **£10 million** for initiatives that will help the Council reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
- (2) Oxford City Council (pop 150k) are investing **£50 million** over 40 years including £7.2 on energy efficiency in homes and Council buildings and £4 million on other climate change reduction measures over the next 4 years
- (3) Cornwall Council (pop 500k) is investing £17 million
- (4) Other Council like Tower Hamlets, Nottingham, Herefordshire and Manchester are investing to reach their respective zero carbon targets of 2025, 2028, 2030 and 2038

Whereas Spelthorne has set aside a mere £250k in the budget!

Embarassingly, Spelthorne is also lagging behind councils like Waverley, Guildford, Mole Valley and Woking that have already declared climate emergencies and have climate action plans developed.

As far as I understand, Spelthorne still has no Climate Emergency Action Plan, nor has a formal system of evaluating and scoring projects which takes account of the impact on the council's carbon footprint.

We're lagging behind in urgency, operational capacity and spending on Climate action.

I continue to have the impression that the current administration is convinced that such funding is "**discretionary**" and not really required.

This could not be more wrong.

Responsible politics requires that we take the Climate Emergency seriously and put our money where our mouth is NOW before we need to spend even more money on the worst effects of Climate change.

We believe a minimum investment of £1 million to mitigate the effects of the Climate emergency and specie loss is absolutely necessary and ought to include spending on the following:

Budget Proposals

- (1) **£1 million Climate Emergency Project Fund** to include
- (2) A grant pot (for project/capital costs) that environmental organisations, groups and individuals can bid for to address biodiversity loss, help Spelthorne reach carbon net zero, improve environmental education, create green jobs, support for community allotments, etc: £250,000
- (3) £100,000 grant to the Talking Tree (first Climate Emergency Centre in Spelthorne) to help Spelthorne reach carbon zero
- (4) Invest into Green **capacity building at SBC** to reach net zero, improve our environment and stop the loss of local species:
- (5) A senior sustainability officer/manager
- (6) A Green Project Grant officer (full time) to access Govt green grants on a wide variety of issues incl flood adaptation, afforestation, installation of electric vehicle charging facilities, energy efficiency schemes, active travel (traffic measures such as support for walking and cycling initiatives) etc.¹ At the moment, we do not have the capacity to put in bids and are missing out on Govt grants.

¹ As stated in the LGA publication "Financing Green Ambitions" of 27th November 2020: "Green grants cover areas as diverse as flood adaptation work, afforestation and the installation of electric vehicle charging facilities. Green grants are being used by the Government as part of the response to the recession resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, with significant sums currently on offer for building energy efficiency schemes." (p.3)
<https://www.local.gov.uk/financing-green-ambitions-full-report>

- (7) A Green/ethical investment officer – it is both ethically and financially concerning that we keep investing in fossil fuels and increasing Climate Change when it makes no financial or logical sense whatsoever
- (8) A Clean Air & active travel officer (incl to work on institution of Clean Air Zone, idling, active travel (promotion of cycling/walking), traffic calming schemes, local plan cycling strategy etc)
- (9) Green Schools Officer (to work with schools on carbon neutrality, carbon footprint reduction, educational materials & projects re Climate emergency, donut economics etc)
- (10) Two (full time) biodiversity officers including local wildlife/hedgehog officer to increase hedgehog population in Spelthorne): ~ £27,000 x 2
- (11) Funds to create **Green/sustainable jobs** in Spelthorne (especially when furlough ends and there are increased job losses and hardship across Spelthorne) e.g. working with Colleges to create retrofitting courses (to retrofit homes with insulation, etc.) This is what Spelthorne should be pushing for.
- (12) Money for **capital green projects** across the borough (to get Spelthorne to net zero asap) incl bike shelters/secure bike storage at stations, feasibility study to work with SCC re cycle routes, investigation of solar farms/increased solar panels on public buildings, car parks etc & local energy generation, carbon footprint training for SBC staff, residents, companies etc
- (13) A fund for **air & noise pollution measures** (incl screening for traffic & other noise through tree planting etc that are not funded by SCC)
- (14) Funds required to hold a **Climate Emergency Citizens Assembly**/Youth Climate Emergency Citizens Assembly so we can harness all the talent across Spelthorne to address the Climate emergency together

We have been told that the current administration plans to put into effect a COVID19 recovery plan of £1 million and believe that this should include:

Additional COVID-related/influenced projects (£500,000):

- (15) COVID Hardship/Emergency fund for grants & zero interest loans for Spelthorne residents and organisations
- (16) Grant Fund for charities/schools/groups/individuals etc benefiting vulnerable, destitute or isolated residents (including children, those with physical and mental health problems and the elderly) during the pandemic.
- (17) Financial support to schools to ensure all their pupils can access digital learning – this should not just be left to individual Councillors to attempt to cover with their Better Neighbourhood grants.
- (18) Two additional posts for **Citizens Advice Bureau** (to advise on debt management, housing, employment, benefits, social security and immigration – more problems are to be expected when furlough ends)

- (19) Increased financial support to **Domestic Violence** & other trauma services (to deal with spike in DV magnified during lock downs etc). Consideration of establishing a refuge in Spelthorne.
- (20) Study on effect of COVID on residents and SMEs in Spelthorne (incl voluntary sector and arts in Spelthorne) to be in a position to meet needs and develop strategies to minimise impact of pandemic

This administration stated that they would invest into affordable housing. I cannot see enough provision for charities that are left with a huge burden in that regard.

Affordable housing

- (21) More money for **affordable housing – Rentstart (£500,000)**

400 new clients in the last year (1 April – 31st March) – highest ever.

- Expects to house 100-110 until 31 March – a shortfall of **300** clients who will otherwise end up on the SBC housing list!
- Currently support 125 housed clients & a total deposit bond of £80,000.
- Only have 2 full time staff members, one of which is also expected to write funding applications, one funded by National Lottery, the other by SBC
- SBC grant this year – despite a higher request – was £5k less than the year before (£40,000 instead of 45k – and 50k requested)
- Both full time staff have been working at full capacity to house 100 clients.
- To meet the shortfall of 300, Rentstart would require two more full-time staff at £40,000, to house 100 people costs £120,000 in rent in advance and deposits (x 3) = £360,000 = **£440,000**

I have 2 questions:

Can the current leadership confirm that the proposals to mitigate the social effects of COVID can be included under the COVID emergency fund and that the funding for Rentstart can be included in any social housing rubric – as it is not for 1 ½ employees at Rentstart to cover the heavy responsibility of trying to accommodate 300 struggling residents without the resources to do so.

I am also proposing an amendment to the budget to increase the current sum of £250k for Climate Change & Green initiatives to £1million.

Jan Doerfel
Leader of the Green Group at SBC
25/2/21

