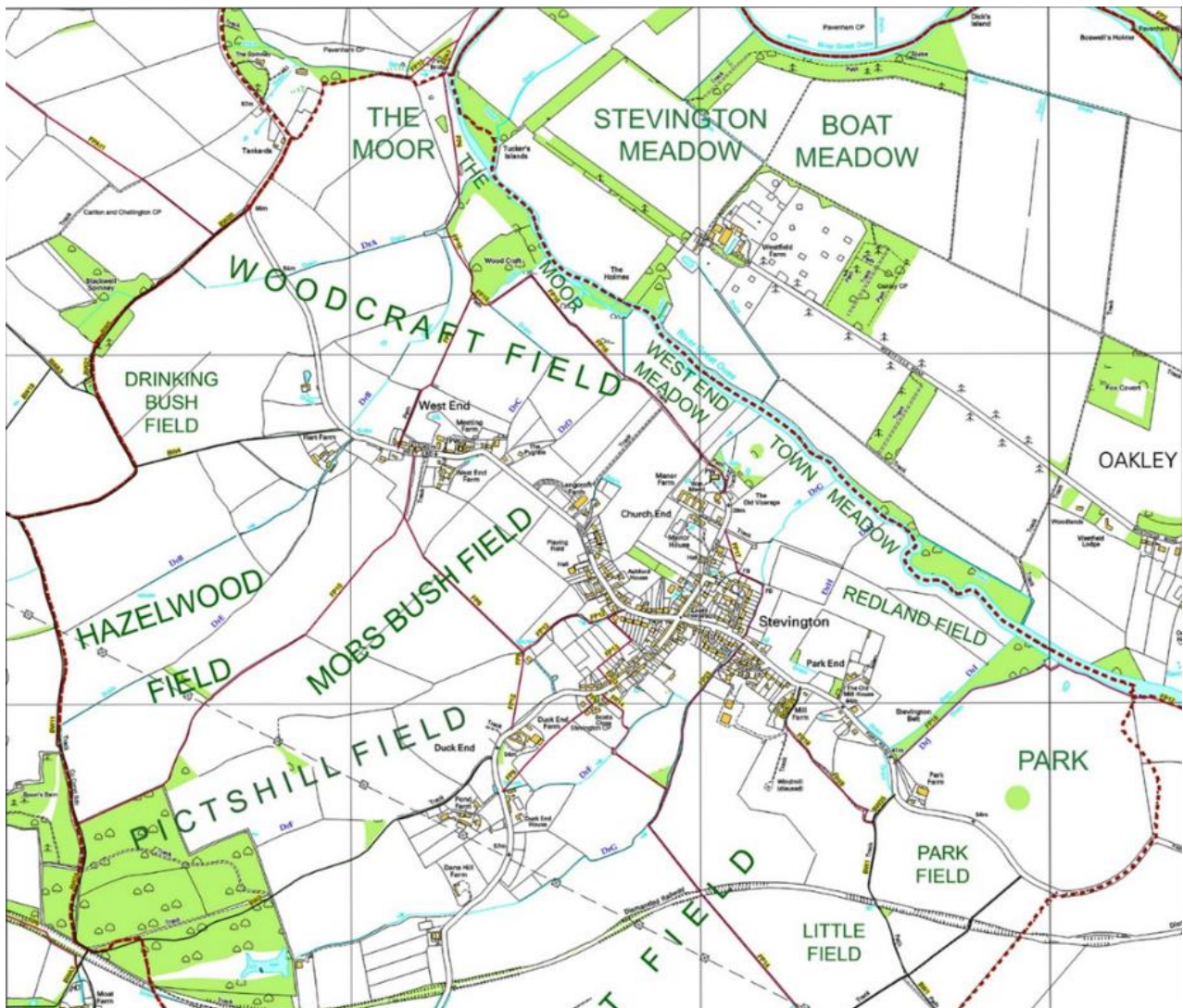


Stevington Parish Environmental Manifesto

Building Community Resilience to Climate Change



The problem

Global warming is causing more frequent weather extremes. Alongside this, we are also experiencing significant environmental degradation, which has led to substantial loss of wildlife and species biodiversity. This is partly caused by our own historic practices but is also being accelerated by climate change. The impact on all our lives is likely to get significantly worse if we do nothing.

What we can do locally

Despite public concerns over climate change, the scale of the problem is not so huge that it is beyond the ability of local councils and communities to take action. What we can do to mitigate the impact of climate change is:

- Improve Stevington's resilience to the impact of those changes that are already under way.
- Ensure that the Parish Council uses its existing powers to act in an environmentally beneficial way
- Spread information on environmental and climate-related matters and actions which people can take to alleviate the problem.
- Change our own behaviours where we recognise that they contribute to further damage.

This document seeks to encapsulate some of the actions which could be taken in different spheres of the problem. Further details can be found in the appendices to this document.

Why have we written this?

SPC requested Stevington Environmental Group (SEG) to produce this document, as a result of a village survey about environmental issues which was carried out in June 2022. This document is the first draft of what will become an environmental '*manifesto*' for Stevington Parish and its Council. Its key aim is to build on that survey and present Stevington community's position on climate change and what we might need to do to prepare for and adapt to it and reduce the loss of biodiversity. It has been produced by a working party officially constituted by the Parish Council to coordinate the opinions and views of village residents, landowners and farmers within the parish.

Recent UK Environmental Legislation

There is an increasing volume of environmentally-related legislation which will need to be considered by the Parish Council, of which The Environment Act and the Climate Change Act are some of the most significant. A brief description of these and links to them are detailed in the appendix to this document. This document aims to help the village to help the Stevington Parish Council (*SPC, The Parish Council*) comply with this and upcoming legislation and support the government's aim to reduce our GHG emissions by 2030 to a level of 68% below 1990 level and become totally carbon neutral by 2050 [1].

Who is this document for?

The target audience for this document is SPC and the Stevington community, although we hope that its message will be heard by Bedford Borough Council (*BBC*) which is also grappling with these issues, but with differing priorities, needs and objectives. This document should also provide an important input to future reviews of the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan (SNDP)[2] and environmental policies for the parish.

What do we mean by the environment?

For the purposes of this manifesto, the term environment includes the built environment, including the level of housing development in the parish, the atmospheric environment, the acoustic environment and the natural environment including gardens, agricultural land, river and riparian zone, together with the ecology it supports.

Impacts on Stevington of environmental change

What impact could global climate changes have on the UK and Stevington and what, if anything, can we as individuals and a community actually do about it? There is now no doubt that the main impact of a hotter world will be more extreme weather-events of longer duration. Stevington had its highest ever officially recorded temperature of almost 40°C in July 2022 and the predictions are that we will experience more frequent, longer periods of drought in summer, water and energy shortages. At other times of the year, we can expect more intense rain fall and flash flooding. It will lead to higher risk of damage to crops, homes and gardens, which may exacerbate the effect of other trends, such as supply chain interruption.

Stevington Parish Council and its residents may need to consider the temperature resilience of their homes and the wider village assets; flash-flood defences; changes to energy consumption and generation; and availability of more locally sourced food.

What are we asking of the Parish Council?

The following resolutions have been prepared for consideration by Stevington Parish Council. Each resolution will be drafted into a formal proposition, to be agreed by councillors, in future parish council meetings.

Resolution 1: Commit to addressing climate change

- 1 Acknowledge that climate change is already impacting upon the daily lives of our community and our local environment, and that this impact is likely to get significantly worse if we do nothing.
- 2 Accept that although the scale of the problem is huge, there remain multiple ways in which the actions of individuals and groups in the Stevington community can make a difference and that this collective action can potentially both alter the global outcomes and mitigate the local impacts.
- 3 Resolve that in future, SPC should take into account the likely impact on the local environment, whether negative or positive, for all decisions and actions they take and continue to endorse and actively promote existing and future environmental policies within the current and future SNDP in application decisions.

Resolution 2: Improve Stevington's resilience to Climate change

- 1) Establish a 'Heat and Drought Resilience Group': this group will work in parallel with Stevington Flood Prevention Group and
 - a) Request that its first priority be, in partnership with other community groups, to assess the potential for and create proposals to adapt key community buildings, such as the village hall and church room, to act as refuges from heat and cold.
 - b) Support feasibility assessments studies for community scale energy sources.

Resolution 3: Ensure that the SPC uses its existing powers

The community would like SPC to act in an environmentally beneficial way for

The Built Environment

- 1) Consider treating favourably, as a matter of policy, applications by residents to improve the energy efficiency or climate resilience of their homes
- 2) Consider treating unfavourably, as a matter of policy, applications for development in the village which are unusually energy intensive in both construction and ongoing operation
- 3) In conjunction with Bedford Borough Council, lobby national government for financial assistance and grant funding to support residents in making this transition, promoting community schemes where appropriate.

Transport

- 1) Ensure that pavements on streets are appropriately maintained and appropriately accessible
- 2) Commission a report to assess the need for and benefit of providing public EV charging

The natural environment

- 1) Commission an annual survey of biodiversity in the parish to build on the work of the Stevington Environmental Group. Book and action at least one recommendation per annum on ways to improve the natural environment afterwards
- 2) Ensure that any green spaces over which SPC has authority are managed to encourage greater biodiversity.
- 3) Ensure that footpaths around the village are appropriately maintained and appropriately accessible and establish a public register showing ownership of each of the footpaths in the village so that those wishing to help improve or maintain them know who to contact.

- 4) Re-establish a working dialogue with parish farmers and landowners with the aim of encouraging the farming community to be represented on the Council and creating at least one fully open forum per year to discuss matters pertaining to farmland in and around Stevington, e.g. footpaths and bio-diversity.
- 5) Encourage and support local food production providing their activities are not harmful to the environment
- 6) Require a higher burden of evidence for proposals that impede initiatives to restore natural ecosystems and promote biodiversity through regenerative farming methods.

Resolution 4: To Change our own behaviours

- 1) Ensure that all community buildings have plans and funds in place to reduce their carbon footprints.
- 2) Encourage and support initiatives to raise funding to promote household and community energy saving schemes where appropriate. Require a higher burden of evidence for proposals which block such initiatives.
- 3) Explore the expansion of the variety of items which can be recycled via local schemes, possibly through the provision of additional bottle-type banks to augment the work of Bedford Borough Council.

Resolution 5: Educate on Climate Action.

- 4) Support SEG in extending the current successful programme of talks and forums, which disseminate practical guidance on energy and biodiversity by providing space on its official website to publicise past, current and future talks.
- 5) Support the development of the Church Room as a hub and an informal advice centre on energy, environment and ecology and make some kind of grant to the shop in recognition of its hub status.
- 6) Share additional information on ecology and biodiversity via SPC website and all associated social media, including parish magazine and leaflets.
- 7) Forge links with external organisations such as
 - a) Beds Rural Communities Charity to help develop SPC environmental policies related to Green Infrastructure methods
 - b) Bedfordshire Great Ouse Valley Environmental Trust to support actions to prevent pollution in the river Great Ouse and develop a thriving river ecology

Benefits of Working together

It is increasingly recognised by many authorities who work on the social implication of climate change, that a community that works together creating low carbon, energy efficient homes in an ecologically rich environment has a far better quality of life which brings many social, health and wealth benefits. By making our homes and our village resilient to climate change and more energy efficient, our properties will become more desirable and Stevington a more attractive place to bring up a family.

Available Documentation

This document is the complete environmental manifesto including detailed appendices. It is available on the Stevington Village website ([Village Home - Stevington Village](#)). In addition to the manifesto to the parish council, a separate document entitled Environmental Guidance for residents has been compiled by the Stevington Environmental Group. This document can also be found on the Stevington Village website. If you are unable to access any of these documents, please reach out to any of the names listed in this document for a copy.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX 1: Synopses of future resolutions

Improve Stevington's resilience to the impact of climate change

Climate resilience means being able to keep cool in summer, warm in winter, safe from droughts and floods and have enough food to eat and clean water for drinking and washing. Deeper resilience also enables us to bounce back from adversity more easily.

Having 'climate refuges' in our community assets – somewhere to keep warm or cool, whilst improving our homes and the natural environment of the village to change the way we consume and travel, will enable the village to mitigate the impact of adverse climate events on ourselves. There are things we can do ourselves and others where we will need outside help. There is a lot of work ahead of all of us, if we are to achieve resilience before its necessity become imperative, so our first and key proposal in this area is:

Policy Proposal:

We request that SPC

- establishes a 'Heat and Drought Resilience Group' to work in parallel with Stevington Flood Prevention Group.
 - request that its first priority be, in partnership with other community groups, to assess the potential for and create proposals to adapt key community buildings, such as the village hall and church room, to act as refuges from heat and cold.

Ensure the Parish Council uses existing powers to act in an environmentally beneficial way

The type of energy we use

Over the next decades the UK will transition from hydrocarbon energy sources (oil and gas) to other energy sources. What this means for our homes is that we will need to change from gas and oil-fired boilers to cleaner energy sources. We can choose to continue to purchase electrical energy from the grid, but we can also look at installing our own renewable energy resource such as Solar PV (either with or without storage batteries), ground- and air-source heat-pumps and solar water heating. These are decisions for individual homeowners but some of these ideas could also be implemented as small community facilities.

Future Community Assets

As well as the existing community assets there may well be a need to develop future community assets related to energy and the environment. Consideration should be given to community projects which are of a scale that needs more than one individual or group to make them happen. Examples of this include energy generation and storage to supply groups of houses in the village with secure cost-effective energy sources. Such schemes will require substantial investment mainly from external sources.

Policy Proposal:

We would like to propose that SPC:

- Treats favourably, as a matter of policy, applications by residents to improve the energy efficiency or climate resilience of their homes.
- Treats unfavourably, as a matter of policy, applications for development in the village which are unusually energy intensive in both construction and ongoing operation.
- Supports feasibility assessments studies for community scale energy sources.
- In conjunction with Bedford Borough Council, lobbies national government for financial assistance and grant funding to support residents in making this transition, promoting community schemes where appropriate.

Transport-related carbon emissions

Cars, vans and lorries which use petrol or diesel internal combustion engines are a significant source of emissions and air pollution. There is a surprisingly large and growing volume of traffic flow in the village, despite our size. Most residents use at least one car and also increasingly have shopping delivered to our front doors. There is little residents can do about the carbon emissions of these vehicles, there are however actions individuals can take to reduce their own personal transport-related carbon emissions.

Policy Proposals:

We would like SPC to develop a transport policy to support pedestrians and car users in the following ways:

- Ensure that pavements and footpaths are appropriately maintained and appropriately accessible and establish a public register showing ownership of each of the footpaths in the village so that those wishing to help improve or maintain them know who to contact.
- Commission a report to assess the need for and benefit of providing public EV charging

Building up our Ecology and Biodiversity

Current River, Land, Green Space and Public Footpath Community Assets

The Stevington NDP [2] indicates that there are four official local green spaces identified in the Stevington Neighbourhood development plan. These are the village playing field; the windmill and Windmill Lane; the meadow opposite the Manor Farmhouse, Church Road; and the Stevington Belt and Park adjacent to the river Great Ouse.

Of these, only the village playing field is owned by the parish council, which it jointly manages with the Stevington Social Centre Charity (SSCC). The Borough Council owns the windmill and is supported by the Friends of Stevington Windmill. The remaining 2 green spaces are privately owned.

It is imperative that these areas are not lost, and that the biological diversity of these very important green spaces are further enhanced to provide ecological refuges. A start has been made on the Village Playing Field. This could be further enhanced by planting additional trees, shrubs and wildflowers to encourage more wildlife and create an ecologically rich area for residents to enjoy.

In addition to the above SNDP-specified green spaces, there are other green spaces which have ecological significance in Stevington. For example, the field behind Silver St. and Farley Way, the field opposite Foxbrook, the greenspace by the old Methodist Chapel, the Churchyard and the Holywell Marsh, Stevington Marsh which is an SSSI, Woodcraft and the small patches of trees on farms, the Country Walk and the Road Nature Reserve on the A428. Some of these are privately owned and any actions will require collaboration between the community and landowners, but the village should aspire to improve biodiversity here, too.

There are many footpaths and bridleways around the village and it is important that the accessibility and biodiversity of these paths are maintained or improved and residents and visitors are encouraged to use these for health and wellbeing benefits. The flora and fauna of all our green spaces, footpaths and bridleways need to be monitored, cared for and enhanced where practicable. It is important that we encourage and support our local landowners and farmers in building a flourishing local ecosystem.

Making space for wild life

A key feature of Stevington is that our built environmental footprint across the parish is small. The Stevington Neighbourhood development plan[2] (SNDP, 2020) states that any new developments must preserve and enhance and have no significant adverse impact on Stevington's natural environment.

There are practical and immediate things that can be done to build up our local ecology. Gardens are extremely important to support wildlife and even a small garden can make a significant difference and the land associated with SPC assets can too.

Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity (BRCC)[3] can also provide excellent advice and support on Green Infrastructure, e.g. on where to place benches and information boards, planting community orchards or woodlands, linking footpath to the rights of way network and conversions of large arable fields.

The village hall and playing field are also highly valued community assets. We need SPC to play a leading role in the identification of funding opportunities from whatever sources to sustain these assets and ensure they fully achieve their potential for community services. It is very important to ensure a low carbon footprint and use of renewable

energy sources for the village hall. The playing field also presents a very good opportunity for increasing biodiversity within the village through planting of tree and wildflowers.

Policy Proposals:

We would like SPC to:

- Commission an annual survey of biodiversity in the parish to build on the work of the Stevington environmental book and action at least one recommendation per annum on ways to improve the natural environment afterwards.
- Ensure that any green spaces over which SPC has authority are managed to encourage greater biodiversity.
- Forge links with external organisations such as Beds Rural Community Charity to help develop SPC environmental policies related to Green Infrastructure.

Our Farmers and Land-owners have a big role to play:

Whilst measures taken by the Parish Council and individuals on their smaller plots of land will have a positive impact, by far the biggest difference which can be made to reversing biodiversity loss rests with our farmers and landowners.

Although many of our historical agricultural practices prioritised the maximisation of food production over wildlife habitat, we now know that this has been at the expense of a devastating loss of biodiversity and wildlife. Similarly, the trend to import out-of-season produce has increased CO₂ emissions and 'food miles', whilst leaving us dependent on large chains of supermarkets, which in turn has decimated local shops.

Our farmers and landowners now have immense power to rebuild biodiversity and reduce our food miles. This will come through new farming practices such as regenerative agriculture, which will change the appearance of the land around Stevington and is likely to also impact our footpaths and bridleways. Some of our local farmers are already embarking on this path, whilst others remain focused on sustainable, local food production. We want to encourage and work with all our farmers and landowners to accelerate regeneration whilst also supporting greener, more balanced, economic growth, which recognises the natural conflict between the need for food production and protection of the wider environment.

The river Great Ouse defines the northern boundary of Stevington parish. As identified in the June 2022 survey, the river and the walk between Stevington and Oakley is one of most valued assets of the Stevington community and is also the location of the sailing club. Unfortunately, the quality of the water is under threat. There are many parties that are involved in making improvements to water quality and ecology, including farmers, landowners, Anglian Water and the Environmental Agency. We need to work with these groups to regenerate the ecology of the river and achieve a level of water quality which has bathing water status.

Policy Proposals:

We would like SPC to:

- Re-establish a working dialogue with parish farmers and landowners with the aim of encouraging the farming community to be represented on the Council and creating at least one fully open forum pa to discuss matters pertaining to farmland in and around Stevington, eg footpaths and bio-diversity.
- Encourage and support local food production providing their activities are not harmful to the environment
- Require a higher burden of evidence for proposals which block initiatives that promote re-wilding and aim to increase and preserve local biodiversity through regenerative agriculture.
- Explore how it can support the work of Beds GOVET to protect our river, whether by improving its riverbank, or the water quality within its terms of reference.

Changing Behaviours

As a community we need to be more aware of our own behaviours and how our assets and activities may contribute

to further environmental damage.

Current Built Community Assets

The energy consumption of our shared buildings plays a crucial role in both reducing the village's overall carbon emissions and leading by example for behaviour change. To achieve this, we must collaborate with the management committees and trustees of the Village Hall, Church Room, St. Mary's Church, Baptist Chapel, and Barringer Trust, to decrease their carbon footprint, transition to renewable energy sources, and implement practical measures to decrease energy usage.

Effective energy reduction measures for community buildings often mirror those used in residential settings, but the cost of implementing these measures may require fundraising and grant applications. The SPC should take the lead in coordinating efforts between management committees and trustees, sharing experiences and knowledge where possible, and reviewing plans to reduce energy consumption.

Policy Proposals:

We would like SPC to:

- Ensure that all community buildings have plans and funds in place to reduce their carbon footprints. Plans may include:
 - a) Measuring and reporting their carbon footprint
 - b) Establishing targets for reducing carbon emissions
 - c) Considering insulation and heat loss strategies
 - d) Considering transitioning to renewable energy sources
- Take responsibility be for coordinating efforts to meet targets and for providing support, such as information about grants and funding opportunities, to help the buildings achieve them.

Consumption and Waste

We all consume too much in terms of what we eat, wear and travel. This has a 'double whammy' on the environment in the amount of energy used to create those disposable products and the waste they generate when no longer required.

As a community and as individuals we should be aiming to consume less, waste less and dispose of products more responsibly. SPC can support and encourage this by providing information about more effective recycling of our unwanted products and by developing a culture, where practicable, of repair rather than replace.

Policy Proposals:

We would like SPC to:

- Seek to expand the variety of items which can be recycled via local schemes, possibly through the provision of additional bottle-type banks to augment the work of Bedford Borough Council.
- Support efforts to promote community-wide recycling and composting programs to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills.
- Work with local businesses to reduce packaging waste and promote the use of reusable containers.
- Support the creation of a "repair cafe" where residents can learn how to fix broken items instead of buying new ones

Community Education

The community's education and awareness about environmental and climate-related issues and actions is crucial. Despite this, understanding of how to reduce carbon footprints as individuals and as a community is still lacking. To address this, it is necessary to improve the dissemination of climate-related information through targeted forums for exchanging knowledge and practical experience.

The church room is recognised as a valuable community asset. The Friends of St Mary's (FOSM) plan is for the Church Room to become a "community hub", increasingly acting as an always-open, drop-in, centre to support a range of community activities. It is the logical home for the "knowledge hub" and is an ideal place to provide informal advice on energy, environment and ecology issues. More use could also be made of the community shop in the Church room to reduce produce miles and support the local economy.

Policy Proposals:

We would like SPC to:

- Support SEG in extending the current successful programme of talks and forums, which disseminate practical guidance on energy and biodiversity by providing space on its official website to publicise past, current and future talks.
- Support the development of the Church Room as a hub and an informal advice centre on energy, environment and ecology and make some kind of grant to the shop in recognition of its hub status.
- Share information on ecology and biodiversity via SPC website and all associated social media, including parish magazine and leaflets
- Launch an education campaign to
 - a. Encourage residents to reduce their overall consumption by promoting the principles of minimalism and simple living.
 - b. Raise awareness about the environmental impact of single-use plastics and encourage residents to reduce their use.
 - c. Encourage the use of reusable bags, water bottles, and other items by providing incentives for their use and/or banning single-use plastics.

Appendix 2: Recent Environmental Legislation

Since leaving the EU, there are two new regulations with political objectives which will influence what the UK can do to address climate change. The implementation of these regulations is vital at every level of government; National, Borough and Parish. If successfully implemented, these will have a positive influence on how we, both as individuals and as a community, respond to the climate crisis.

The Environment Act

The Environment Act, which became law in 2021, acts as the new UK framework for environmental protection [4]. Once the UK left the EU, rules on nature protection, water quality, clean air and other environmental protections that originally came from Brussels were at risk. This 2021 Act is intended to fill the gap. The Environment Act allows the UK to embed better environmental protection into law. It provides the Government with powers to set new and binding targets for air and water quality, for biodiversity and waste reduction etc. These targets need to be ambitious, meaningful and informed by experts. The Act also established a new environmental watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), which will hold the Government and other public bodies to account and ensure that environmental laws are complied with [5].

Climate change Act

The Climate Change Act 2019 commits the UK to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 [6]. In 2019, the UK Government and the devolved administrations committed to the 'Net Zero' target as recommended by the Climate Change Committee. Reaching net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions will require extensive changes across the economy, but the foundations are in place. Major infrastructure decisions need to be made in the near future and then quickly implemented. These changes are unprecedented in their overall scale, but large-scale transitions have been achieved successfully in the UK before, such as the natural gas switchover in the 1970s or the switch to digital broadcasting in the 2000s.

The Climate Change Act recognises that reducing GHG emissions will require:

- Resource and energy efficiency, to reduce demand for energy across the economy
- Societal choices that lead to a lower consumption of and demand for carbon-intensive products and activities
- Extensive electrification, particularly of transport and heating, supported by a major expansion of renewable and other low-carbon power generation
- Development of a hydrogen economy to service demands for energy-dense applications such as long-distance HGVs and ships, and for electricity and heating in peak periods
- Carbon capture and storage (CCS) in industry, with bioenergy (for GHG removal from the atmosphere), and very likely for hydrogen and electricity production.

Appendix 3: Community Groups and Related Charities

Community Groups

Stevington Environmental Group SEG: This group was originally set up by SPC and is now operating as an independent group. SEG is the community lead on education and actions related to ecology, energy, waste reduction issues and provides support for members with special interests in biodiversity, support for young people with interests in the environment and ecology (YES Group). It is also organises and runs community awareness talks on many topics.

Stevington Flood Group (SFG): The parish council has established, with support from Bedford Borough Council, the Stevington Flood Group. This group is responsible for assessing and monitoring flood risks and flood risk mitigation measures as needed to ensure that the village is resilient to flooding.

Community Speed Watch Group: This very new group is campaigning for a “safe Stevington” and is focused on the speed and flow of traffic through the village and its impact on community safety, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. Success in this group will impact positively on local air quality.

Friends of St Mary’s (FOSM): This group is a charity involved in managing and developing the facilities and activities for the Church room. The Church room is being developed as a hub for community activities FOSM are particularly keen to develop a hub for meetings and community activities related to energy, ecology, environment and climate change.

Stevington Social Centre Charity (SSCC): This group manages the facilities and activities of the village hall and the playing field, one of the most important Green Spaces for Stevington residents.

1. Related Charities

The above issues are not restricted to Stevington and our resources are not extensive. So, it is important that we collaborate with other relevant environment and Ecology bodies who can help and advise us. Contact details are provided in Table 2 below.

CPRE - The Countryside charity: CPRE was formally known as the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England. They run a number of campaigns which support Nature, Landscapes, Farming, sustainable transport, climate change and energy

BRCC- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity: BRCC is a charity which works across Bedfordshire supporting communities with a wide and varied approach. They support Countryside and community including work on ecology and biodiversity. They have strong community engagement activities including green infrastructure planning and support for neighbourhood planning along with many other services.

Beds GOVET – Bedfordshire Great Ouse Valley Environmental Trust: Beds GOVET is a new recently registered charity which aims to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the Great Ouse Valley through a program of river monitoring, citizen science, community engagement and by the advancement of the education of the public in the understanding of the importance of the river Great Ouse quality on biodiversity, economic and social activities.

Organisation		Contact
CPRE	The Countryside Charity	https://www.cpre.org.uk/
BRCC	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	https://bedsrcc.org.uk/
Beds GOVET	Bedfordshire Great Ouse Environmental Trust	www.bedsgovet.org

Table 2: Relevant bodies which can provide advice

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