

Rising to the challenge: A life on our planet, 11 Jan 2021

This note is a collation of the ideas from the Our Planet Our Future event held on zoom on 11th January.

The event included breakout groups on the four main topics examined in the film. Participants generated lots of ideas as to what they could do at home, with their family, community or business to put nature at the heart of our decisions, and reduce our impact on the Planet. The notes contains

- a) Resources from the “A life on our planet” project
- b) A summary of the resources by topic
- c) The pledges and ideas generated at the event, by topic

If you don't receive the Sustainable St Albans e-newsletter and would like to be here's the [link](#). We hope to see you at our future events!

From the Our Planet Our Future organising team

Resources from the “A life on our planet” project

1. <https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/david-attenborough-life-our-planet>
2. [Save energy, save the planet](#)
3. [Building sustainable food systems](#)
4. [How you can help nature](#)
5. [Make My Money Matter](#)

Summary of resources by topic

1. Energy & consumption - Resources

- [Save energy, save the planet](#)
- <https://sustainablestalbans.org/green-homes-grant-2020/>
- <https://sustainablestalbans.org/welcome/insulating-your-home/>
- <https://sustainablestalbans.org/solar-streets/>

2. Food - Resources

- [Building sustainable food systems](#)
- <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/palm-oil/palm-oil-labelling>
- <https://www.mcsuk.org/goodfishguide/search>
- <https://sustainablestalbans.org/sustainable-food/>
- [Hassle free veganuary blog](#)
- [Low maintenance food garden blog](#)

3. Restoring Nature - Resources

- [How you can help nature](#)
- <https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/actions>
- [RSFive other actions you can take to help Revive Our World](#)
- Local group supporting local street based actions (eg hedgehog streets): [Wilderhood Watch](#)
- Local growing group: [Grow Community Sopwell](#)
- St Albans Trees: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SATrees>
- <https://sustainablestalbans.org/nurture-wildlife/>
- [Protecting the Amazon](#)

4. Finance - Resources

- [Make My Money Matter](#)
- Students campaign (inc and university divestments): [People & Planet's website](#)
- Herts County Council Pension Scheme divestment: <https://divestherts.org>
- Divestment from fossil fuel: [Fossil Free UK](#)
- [Fossil Free UK – Divest Parliament](#)
- [Ethical consumer](#) (need to subscribe)

5. General resources

- <https://www.count-us-in.org/16-steps/>
- <https://sustainablestalbans.org>
- St Albans District Sustainability Festival [Climate Action Card](#)
- [Sustainable St Albans page on the UK Climate Assembly](#)
- [St Albans District Council Climate Change information](#)
- [St Albans District Council Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy](#)
- [Hertfordshire County Council Sustainability information](#)
- Book: 'How Bad are the Bananas?' Mike Berners-Lee
- Book: "We are the weather, saving the planet begins at breakfast", Jonathan Safran Foer
- Book: "Prosperity without Growth", Tim Jackson
- [More book inspiration](#)
- [One tonne of carbon per year](#) blog RosalindReadhead
- [Film inspiration](#)

Pledges and ideas from the event participants by topic

1. Energy - pledges and ideas: How can we save energy and transition to renewables?

a. What can we do in our homes and our daily activities

Energy costs in your home

- Use thermal imaging camera to find quick wins eg thicker curtains, foil behind radiators, loft insulation, foam up drafts
- Only buy genuine green electricity, even if it costs a few pounds more.
- turning down thermostat by 1 degree is a good way to reduce consumption
- Reduce consumption by only doing full load washing machine/dishwasher, washing at a lower temperature, reducing tumble dryer usage and reducing ironing.
- Make your own green energy: solar etc.
- Use solar powered garden lighting;
- Summer cooling – close curtains/windows/doors, don't use cooling appliances - don't get too hot in the first place, plan ahead
- If living in rented accommodation ask for an EPC (and check the property you are renting meets the required standard). Find out what the occupant is allowed to change/ask of the landlord - need for this to be made clearer. Occupants can also focus on what they can do eg adding thick curtains or curtain linings
- Replacing single glazed windows with double or ideally triple glazed windows;
- Looking into replacing gas boilers with ground or air source heat pumps ;

- *The gold standard building or retrofitting your home to Passivhaus standards, adding Mechanical Heat recovery system*
- *Batch cook, freeze portions, food shop from list of menus for the week*
- *Get solar panel at a reduced price with this scheme [St Albans Solar Streets](#)*

Water

- *Reducing water consumption reduces energy too*
- *Use a low-flush toilet, water butt, use grey water for garden, use roof water harvesting – to reduce energy used to provide clean water for everything*

Consumption

- *Reduce consumption – reuse, recycle, reduce, repair, ‘buy cheap-pay dear’*

Travel

- *Try to limit to 1 flight every 3 years/not at all - take train/holiday in UK instead*
- *Drive an EV. EVs - positive experience, good investment, especially if you have a parking space for home charging. PS. The near future vehicle to grid ([V2G](#)) will allow the use of car batteries as a backup source of energy to avoid the grid having to use dirty power at peak times.*
- *Cycle! E-bikes allow you to do more as you get older. Good for light shopping.*
- *Drive smaller cars; plan journeys to minimise car use;*
- *Walk or cycle with children to school*

b. What can we do to save energy in our district

Saving energy in schools

- *[Schools to net zero](#) from Ashden, government grants*
- *Look at energy suppliers, install solar. Bulb, Tesla, Octopus etc can buy your excess.*
- *Education – school curriculums to include environment/nature issues; circular economy; recycling/waste; renewables - see Teach the Future*
- *schools to buy food and drinks inc milk sustainably*
- *[Sustainable Schools webpage](#)*

Transport & roads in the district

- *Electric transport – buses, taxis, cycle delivery services etc*
- *More EV charging points, more incentives to have EV cars*
- *Road signs – solar powered*
- *Street lighting - move to solar power / low ensure, ensure only on when needed*
- *Reduce advertising hoardings powered by electricity – require them to be solar powered*

Public buildings

- *Lobby to have white roofs on public buildings – reduce need for air conditioning in summer*
- *Lobby to have solar power on public buildings*
- *Lobby to have roof water harvesting on public buildings – to reduce energy used to provide clean water for everything*

Businesses

- *Ask businesses about their plans for solar power, white roofs, rain water harvesting too.*

2. Food - pledges and ideas: What changes can we make to transform our food?

a. How can you make changes to your diet that will help to protect nature?

Take small sustainable steps

- Take things one bit at a time, so the changes you make are sustainable
- Go one step at a time; perhaps have a meat free Monday...
- ... or start with having a meat free breakfast and lunch.
- "Be a bit more vegan"
- Eat less red meat, be more mindful
- Realise that it is a spectrum, from meat eating through to vegan, and you can move along the spectrum a little; we aren't in "boxes"

Sharing

- Share images of lovely plant based meals at work, share on social media, make it natural to talk about lovely plant based meals
- Cook them for others when you can too.
- Use the phrase "plant based food" more to make this normal
- Tell people how delicious it is as well as how good it is for them! Eating too much meat is bad for us.
- Talk to our families about it, inform them

What we eat

- Ensure the meat we do eat to be more sustainable e.g. venison, local and wild, and over-populated
- Look for products which are palm oil free, or at least sustainable palm oil (but it's hard because of different names): <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/palm-oil/palm-oil-labelling>
- Cook from scratch when you can, so you know there is no palm oil
- Eat like your Granny ate!
- Food – grow & share; batch cook; freeze portions; shopping list from weekly menus < all to reduce waste
- Grow some fruit and veg in your garden, contact local groups eg [Grow Community Sopwell](#)
- Horizon, 2021: [Feast to Save the Planet](#), examine the carbon footprint of some restaurant meals

b. Influence others (including businesses) in our local area?

- Ask your supermarkets for clearer labelling of "palm oil free" products
- How can we reduce subsidies for meat farmers, which make it artificially economic?
- Don't push it, just talk about your own choices with others, with good humour.
- When attending events always asking for vegan/vegan food
- Cook people delicious meals!
- Keep it pragmatic
- Ask questions, e.g. about meals at the nursery, in the canteen for work

3. Restoring Nature - pledges and ideas: How can we help to restore nature?

a. Making changes your garden

- Add bird feeders, bird baths to your garden, be friendly for hedgehogs
- Add swift boxes or bee bricks
- Make bug hotels.
- Make a small lawn into a wild flower meadow, or set aside part of your lawn or garden for a wild flower meadow or wilder area.
- Agricultural fairs - 'built a stunning bug hotel' to a live audience only to be told NIMBY! However the owner is now proud. Drill holes in logs, plant seeds e.g. grass and wildflower meadow. Inspiring.
- Children great enforcers - learning from home activities, reconnect with nature, not recoil but be a part.
- Plant a tree in your garden, a native variety, maybe a native fruit or nut tree so you have the produce too.
- Grow more fruit and veg

b. Restoring nature locally

Help local community groups who are working to restore and improve nature locally

- Work with schools, eco teams leading projects (see London Schools eco network)
- Connect with [Wilderhood Watch](#) - lockdown has helped make connections
- Also [Grow Community Sopwell](#)
- Get involved in Wilder St Albans - more info from HMWT in Spring

Write emails / letters / tweets!

- Encourage replacement of parking spaces with planters, pedestrianise.
- Encourage councils to not mow their verges - make them butterfly friendly
- Raising planning development issues with [HMWT](#) as well as the planning group.
- Lobby HCC to stop using Glyphosate to kill weeds
- Use influence to stand up for nature locally - write to [Chris White](#) at SADC
- Get involved in Wilder St Albans - more info from [HMWT](#) in Spring
- Respond to Hertfordshire County Council survey to tell them what you think of their [climate change strategy](#).
- The "St Albans Trees" facebook group has asked that even if you don't have time to complete the whole of the HCC Sustainability survey, that you complete Q9 and ask for more roadside trees. Q9 asks what HCC could mitigate the effects of climate change, and you could ask them to plant more trees on roads for summer cooling, lowered flood risk and reduced winter wind speed. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SATrees>

4. Finance - ideas and pledges: How can we reduce the harmful impact of our banks and pensions?

a. How can we encourage our pension providers to invest ethically? - ideas /pledge

Finding out about your pension - research

- Pensions are not always very transparent, takes some digging and sometimes have to use gut feeling
- Researched originally what current funds are invested in and then get hold of the fact sheets (can write to provider to ask for this)
- Next step, look at accounts on companies house, some mention the investments

Asking questions when you can't find out the information

- Use a variety of contacts (web chat vs letter writing)
- Be prepared to write regularly eg every three months, if your pension provider is "looking into changes", write back three months later.... [your letters help to justify their need to take action]
- Send letters to ask how much investment is in fossil fuels, why they haven't yet divested yet, when they will divert by

Making changes

- Use Ethical Consumer / Fossil Free UK guidance
- Make My Money Matter - another org which provides information on better funds
- Where possible, if pensions are private, can buy into an ethical fund on your own (eg water funds, solar energy)
- Can take funds out of old company funds and move them - tell the pension provider WHY you are moving your money

Final salary scheme or pensioner

- You can still write to ask why they haven't yet divested, even if you are not going to move your pension.

b. What else can we do to reduce the harmful impacts of banks or investments?

Banks & bank accounts

- Continue to write to banks to ask the questions about why they aren't divesting in 'bad' investments and investing in sustainable ones (According to Ethical Consumer, Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds Banking Group, NatWest, Santander and the TSB owner, Sabadell, are among the big names that continue to provide finance for, or invest in, fossil fuel companies.)
- Move your bank account to an ethical one. Not difficult to move your bank at all - need to tell people this as many people may never have done it or only done it 20 years ago when it was so much harder than it is now.
- Guardian article on [Ethical Bank Accounts](#) /savings/investments/mortgages article
- The Triodos current account can be operated online and via an app, comes with an [eco-friendly contactless debit Mastercard](#) (it is made from a plastic substitute derived from renewable sources) and offers an overdraft of up to £2,000. But a stumbling block for some will be the £3 monthly account fee, or the fact that Triodos doesn't have any high street branches.

Investments

- *Finances will have the biggest impact*
- *Keep telling people to move to sustainable investments / ask the questions of their providers*
- *Remind people that sustainable investments are the future and are more likely to have better returns*
- *Why are people so reluctant to invest sustainably? When is the change going to happen, if we don't make the change.*
- *Triodos invest in people / planet / nature / renewable energy etc*

All our spending matters

- [Make My Money Matter](#) (a people-powered campaign fighting for a world where we all know where our pension money goes, and where we can demand it's invested to build a better future.) "Did you know your pension is likely invested in fossil fuels, tobacco, and arms? Much of the £3 trillion in UK pensions is contributing to the deforestation of the Amazon, helping tobacco companies sell cigarettes, and funding new fossil fuel projects."
- *We need to consider where we spend our money in ALL areas (eg food shopping / clothing)*
- *Our money is powerful; choosing where we spend it - and telling providers or asking them re investments*
- *Write letters (physical letter still has impact) / send tweets (seen by many so big impact and harder for the company to ignore) to anyone you spend money with regarding their sustainability policy with respect to fossil fuel investments (and other matters)*
- *Subscribe to [Ethical Consumer](#) (£30 a year) to access*

Divestment from fossil fuels

- *Lobby for divestment of public sector staff pension schemes/banks from fossil fuel investments*
- **Herts County Council:** <https://divestherts.org> (Divest Herts is a coalition of groups and concerned individuals who want our County Council to lead the way in tackling climate change at a local level. Group is asking Hertfordshire County Council to divest from fossil fuel investments!) [See recent report](#) that shows The Hertfordshire Local Government Pension Scheme fund has almost halved the size of its investments in fossil fuels from £94m in December 2019 to £48m in June 2020.
- **Hertfordshire Pension Fund** - More to do? Email the chair of the Herts Pension Committee derrick.ashley@hertfordshire.gov.uk
- **Lobby for national changes:** [Divest Parliament](#) ask your MP to sign this cross party petition
- **Students:** you can call on your university to break ties with the fossil fuel industry and stand up for our future. Almost half of UK universities have already made divestment commitments, but there's still work to do. Go to [People & Planet's website](#) to find a university campaign
- [Fossil Free UK](#) lobby for institutions need to align their investments with their values. We're all complicit in fossil fuel consumption, and we should do all that we can to reduce our own use, but the real culprits – the ones who are rigging the system – are the fossil fuel companies. [The largest 200 coal, gas and oil companies own oil, gas and coal reserves that represent a significant percentage of the entire global market.](#) These companies, incidentally, are also among the largest contributors to politicians' of all stripes across the world — they're the ones writing laws, and [getting billions in government handouts each year.](#) They skew the market in their favour, limiting the scope that climate-friendly lifestyle choices can have within the existing system. . For a full list of the companies and their reserves from [Fossil Free Indexes.](#)

Changing the premise away from growth

- Need to change the measurement from growing to thriving (eg change the measurement of gdp to include more sustainable measures)
- [Fantastic Kate Raworth talk on thriving economics](#) (our March 2021 event will look at doughnut economics)

Start with small steps, then bigger, until you are a Climate Hero!

	Home energy	Food	Getting about	Stuff	Spread the word
Be inspired	 Explore the Energy Saving Trust website.	 Watch films: • Cowspiracy • Just Eat It	 Watch Healthy Air's video: https://bit.ly/airfilm	 Watch films: • The Clean Bin Project • A Plastic Ocean	Watch TED • Greta Thunberg https://bit.ly/gretavideo • Global population growth https://bit.ly/growthbox
Getting started	 Switch to a renewable energy supplier.	 Try non-dairy milk: e.g. oat, hemp, soya, almond.	 Share lifts for as many car journeys as possible.	Join Freegle. Easy to do online. Allows you to find stuff you need and find a home for stuff you don't.	Sign Sustainable St Albans' Climate Emergency petition - see opposite.
Next Steps...	 Change all your light bulbs to LEDs - even the tricky ones.	Make a vegan lunch - then make more vegan meals. Check out vegansociety.com	 Make sure your bike is roadworthy and use it.	 Get a reusable water bottle. Refill it to avoid plastic bottles.	Write to your bank/pension provider - ask them not to invest in fossil fuels.
Now we're talking!	Insulate loft and walls. Draught proof doors and windows.	 Cut out food waste. See lovefoodhatewaste.com	Walk/cycle for short trips. Use public transport for longer journeys.	 Learn how to repair things - by sewing, fixing, upcycling.	Work out your carbon footprint and tell people about it. footprint.wwf.org.uk
You're a climate hero	 If you have a roof, research if it's suitable for solar panels.	 Cut out beef. Only eat other meat occasionally.	 Use the train not the plane for holidays. seat61.com for advice.	Check Freegle, eBay and charity shops first to avoid buying new.	 Join an environmental group and help others take action.