

COOMBE BISSETT PARISH COUNCIL

Policy Proposal

The PC adopts a policy to encourage and promote the planting of native trees across the Parish; in order to enhance the local environment and contribute towards the UK achieving carbon emission neutrality.

Background

The PC is aware of the growing concern with regard to global-warming, population growth, ecological damage, the threat of plastics to the environment, species extinction, the increase in extreme weather events etc.

It also notes that solutions to these issues and mitigation of their effects will usually require action at national and international level. However there are actions which small communities (and individuals) can take to contribute to wider solutions and have a beneficial effect on the local environment.

The Changing Local Environment

It is widely agreed that Coombe Bissett and Homington are set in an attractive part of rural southern England. However over time their environment has changed considerably. This is most visible in new housing development and the increase in traffic. One of the effects of this is that there are many less trees and hedgerows than there were even 50 years ago¹. There are a number of reasons behind these changes:

- New housing developments, particularly those that took place between the 1970s and the 1990s.
- Dutch Elm Disease and other tree pathogens.
- Changes in farming practices.
- The number of individual trees which have been removed to enable limited building or garden development, which have subsequently not been replaced or substituted.

Trees and the Environment

Trees, shrubs and hedgerows make an important contribution to the environment. They are a central aspect of local ecology and play a key role in supporting bio-diversity. They are rich in insect and other invertebrate life; and provide homes and food for many varieties of birds and mammals.

In addition trees make an important contribution to the climate by capturing carbon dioxide (sequestration) and producing oxygen. All climate-change scientists seem to agree that increasing the number of trees can play a substantial part in achieving carbon neutrality and helping to combat climate change.

Recent scientific research has suggested that if the number of trees in the UK can be increased by 75% over the next 25 years; together with the other steps which have

¹ No specific empirical research has been conducted into this issue. However many of the villages' longer term residents support this view.

already been taken or are planned by the Government, the UK should achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Tree Species

If the number of trees in the Parish is increased, it is important that the species used compliment the environment and support local ecology. It would be most appropriate therefore, to use native broad-leafed deciduous varieties including: beech, hazel, oak, ash, willow and field maple. Other species including: hawthorn, blackthorn and old varieties of apples and pears etc, may also be appropriate. The exact species and mix of species to be used would depend on the specific location.

Broad-leaved deciduous trees are also the most efficient at carbon sequestration.

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Making the Policy Happen

Although there may be some 'quick wins' that can be put in place relatively quickly, a policy such as this needs to be applied in the medium to long term over at least 10 years. If the policy is adopted, it will need a multi-stranded approach to identify appropriate opportunities to enhance the tree numbers in the Parish. These include:

- A review of all Parish Council controlled land to identify opportunities for further tree planting.
- Work with Wiltshire Council to identify potential sites including road side verges.
- Work with the AONB to identify potential sites.
- Work with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to identify potential sites.
- Work with and encourage local landowners and homeowners to identify opportunities to increase the numbers of trees on their land or in their gardens.

Finance

The PC is not in a position by itself to fund the large scale planting of new trees on the scale that might be required. Therefore, as with many activities in our villages, it should be resourced, through a mixture of grants, community contributions, partnership with other organizations, and individual contributions including voluntary work. The Parish Council will consider using its funds as part of its normal budget process. In addition any larger schemes may be eligible for a grant from the Community Benefit (Solar Farm) Fund provided it is compliant with the agreed grant policy.