

A 10 YEAR ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN FOR PONTELAND

'PONTENVIROLAND'

SUMMARY

This 10 year, outline Action Plan is intended to improve the Environment in Ponteland and its surrounds. It is proposed that the Plan is launched this year in line with the 'Queen's Green Canopy' National Tree Initiative' commemorating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022. A range of tree planting actions are included together with a number of other projects such as general rewilding, local wildlife support and litter removal. It is proposed that a Ponteland Environmental Action Plan Group be set up to represent the local community to further develop, plan and manage the project over the years. The Club's Environmental Action Plan, hopefully, will assist the Ponteland area in managing key environmental issues in the short, medium and longer term. In addition, it is intended to liaise with Rotary at District, National and International levels to see if there are any further ideas that Ponteland can use or even Rotary generally can use to the wider benefit of the environment.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Interestingly, the Environmental Action Plan is also in line with the 'Earthshot' project, which was launched last year by the Duke of Cambridge and which has £50m to fund projects for managing serious environmental challenges over the next decade. Five prizes of £1m will be awarded each year until 2030 for the following key categories:

- Protecting and restoring nature, including saving species from extinction
- Tackling air pollution, such that the whole world has the benefit of clean air
- Reviving oceans and ensuring they are used sustainably
- Reducing waste by ensuring that leftovers of one process become the raw materials of the next
- Managing climate change by building a carbon neutral economy.

Earthshot prize entries are open to a wide range of applicants, including individuals, teams and communities. The implementation of the Ponteland Environmental Action Plan could possibly fall into one of the above categories.

The Action Plan also clearly matches 'Queen's Green Canopy' National Tree Initiative, which will officially be launched in May 2021, in advance of and to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022. It is led by 'Cool Earth', in partnership with the UK Government and the Woodland Trust. It encourages town councils, community groups, charities, schools, and other groups, together with businesses and landowners to come together with the

common purpose of greening their local environment by creating a network of individual or specimen trees, tree avenues, copses and woodlands.

At the end of the first World War tree cover in the UK was 5%; it has since improved and is now 15%. However, the EU average is well over 30%. For the record, putting Kielder aside, Northumberland is one of the lowest tree covered counties in England. Tree planting is now in the Government manifesto; namely 30,000 hectares by 2025 but only 736 hectares were planted in England in 2020. The planting rate needs to increase by a factor of 10 to meet the target. Finally, the Woodland Trust will supply trees free of charge to schools and communities.

An item of general interest is the 'Rewilding Britain' campaign that promotes the returning of 5% of Britain to the wild; and to create wildlife corridors that animals and plants can move through.

An additional interesting option is to set up a Ponteland Community Benefit Society/Trust to purchase land in the community for tree planting and biodiverse rewilding. It would be similar to those created by Harrogate Rotary and the Nidd Gorge Community, both in Yorkshire. Although both started with campaigns to prevent local developments, each ended up forming a community group that purchased farmland for tree planting, creation of wildflower meadows and pond creation. Interestingly, the Nidd Gorge Community benefit society sold shares amounting to £370,000 to 3,000 buyers, including both individuals and businesses.

Plastic is a major problem in several of the above key environmental categories, particularly in the oceans. Every day 8 million pieces of plastic end up in the sea. The largest plastic garbage patch (gyre) is in the centre of the Pacific and is 1.6 million square kilometres in size. One million seabirds die each year from plastic pollution and a third of fish caught for human consumption contain plastic. On average, each person eats approximately 70,000 microplastics each year. This issue clearly needs to be tackled urgently; locally, nationally and internationally.

Another interesting environmental campaign has been started by Birdlife International (based at the David Attenborough Building in Cambridge, UK). It is named '1Planet1Right' and states that the world's unsustainable system is causing climate chaos, mass extinction of species, pollution and human suffering. They are calling on the United Nations to add '**The right to a healthy environment**' to the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' and are asking supporters to sign their petition (www.1PLANET1RIGHT.ORG) to support efforts to make a healthy planet a universal human right.

Rotary has a worldwide organisation named ESRAG (Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group). It aims to build awareness, inspire action and implement club and district-level projects focussed on increasing environmental sustainability and mitigation of climate disruption. Ideally, this Plan will fall into this category.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 1. Ponteland and surrounds:** Local liaison with Ponteland organisations; including the Town Council, local businesses, schools, other clubs including the Northumberland Wildlife Trust and local wildlife groups is essential. It is proposed that a local 'Environmental Action Group' be set up to finalise and manage the project, with Ponteland Rotary as one of the many supporters.

The following are the initial list of environmental projects:

- **Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebration:** it is proposed that a suitable tree (Oak or Yew) is planted at a key location in the centre of Ponteland, together with a plaque in recognition of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Reference could also be made to the Environmental project. A time capsule could also be installed:
- **General Tree planting:** Regarding the Woodland Trust's offer of free trees, the Club has recently contacted local schools in this regard. On the community front, Ponteland residents and locally based companies will be encouraged to plant trees in their land and gardens.
- **Rewilding Ponteland and its surrounds:** it is proposed that, where practical, industrial and domestic garden areas have a 'Wild Corner' that encourages wild plants, animals, birds and insects to thrive. Local farmers could do the same at the edges and corners of fields. A section of Ponteland park could be rewilded and protected to prevent human (and dog) intrusion. An extension to the park would be a major advantage.
- **New Woodland Plantation:** examine the option of setting up a local community benefit society to purchase land for tree planting and creating a biodiverse habitat.
- **Local Wildlife: (1)** Support the local efforts to maintain the population of Red Squirrels.
(2) As modern building structure does not help birds to nest within, as in earlier days, the provision of nest boxes for a range of species of bird would be a benefit, particularly for swifts, house sparrows, etc.
(3) In the 1950's it was estimated that there were over 30 million hedgehogs in the UK; the current estimate is less than one million! The creation of 'Hedgehog Pathways' is strongly recommended which should include holes in fences (13 x 13cm) at ground level. Unlike for most other animal species, fences are a real problem for hedgehogs. The provision of 'Hedgehog Homes' in wild corners would also be a benefit.
- **Plastic and Litter:** Examine, very carefully, what can be done both to reduce the amount of plastic used, especially single use plastic, none essential packaging, etc. Have a regular programme of litter removal in Rotary Way and other key local sites.
- **School liaison:** Work with local schools on environmental projects.

- **Local Rotary Club liaison:** Where appropriate, work with other local Rotary Clubs on environmental issues.

2. Rotary District, National and International, including ESRAG

- **Rotary Club Environmental Plan:** When circulated to Rotary District, National and International, ESRAG's comments and advice would be awaited with great interest. Subject to appropriate changes and improvements, the Ponteland Plan could possibly even be used as a model for other clubs to develop and use in their local communities.
- **1PLANET1RIGHT:** if all Rotarians signed this petition the message may get through to the United Nations. It is therefore strongly recommended that the information be circulated throughout Rotary worldwide.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE ACTIONS

This document will be circulated, initially to Ponteland Town Council and to a number of potential local supporters both for their comments and support. Thereafter a Ponteland Action Group should be set up as soon as possible.

This document will also initially be sent to Rotary District for circulation to ESRAG.

Further actions will depend both on the local Ponteland response and the Rotary response, particularly that of ESRAG.

Rotary Club of Ponteland, February 2021