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Sustainable Blewbury activities

Love Food Hate Waste

14th March - CANCELLED

This was a new venture for Sustainable Blewbury – a food event in collaboration with Blewbury Women's Institute. The take-up was not as good as we had hoped for and then it had to be cancelled because of the current pandemic. But we do have some ideas about the sort of food event that might attract more people after we can all return to normal (and after the Village Hall reopens). Watch this space!



Repair cafes

Saturday 25th April – CANCELLED; Saturday 27th June – PROVISIONAL

Our first repair cafe, in February, was a big success and we hoped to make them a regular feature, perhaps every two months. We were planning two more, but obviously we have had to cancel the one planned for 25th April and we are waiting to see if the current restrictions will allow us to run a repair cafe on 27th June.



In terms of numbers our first Repair Cafe was a real success: 36 customers brought in 51 items of which 42 were repaired/made usable, a success rate of 82%, which was amazing, although only 5 of the 9 electrical items could be repaired (56%). This was not surprising because it is impossible to even open up many modern appliances. Many of our customers asked when the next cafe would be, and we will definitely run another one in the autumn.

There is an interesting article on "Repair cafes ... and planned obsolescence" on pages 4–5.

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 29th April – POSTPONED

We had planned to have a short AGM followed by an interesting and beautifully made film about biodiversity loss. We are postponing the meeting and film, probably until autumn, again due to the Covid-19 situation.

Blewbury Garden Market

We were planning to open (for our 11th year) at the village celebration of the 75th anniversary of VE Day on 8th May. Sadly, that has had to be cancelled.

We don't think it is feasible to run our Saturday morning stall in the usual way while adhering to the current safety rules, but hope we will be able to resume later in the summer.



For the spring, we are trying to think of a way for people to be able to buy, sell, and perhaps exchange garden seedlings and plants in a safe way. With garden centres closed, this would be very useful for people who want to grow their own fruit and vegetables. If you have any ideas about how that might work please contact Eric at info@sustainable-blewbury.org.uk or 07935 232 296.

Blewbury Climate Action news



The people who came to the initial Blewbury Climate Action meetings had different ideas about what they thought important to do. Eventually this was narrowed down by public vote to the five favourite topics to work on: energy, transport, waste reduction, food and tree planting. The runners up, with about 7% each, were biodiversity improvement, political and economic actions and sustainable communities.

Time to read, to research, and to write

But it looks as if it will be some time before we can take action as a group, although individual actions are still possible, and still important. One thing most of us have at the moment is time, to read more about what is happening to the climate and our environment, and to decide what we personally can do to protest if we think something wrong. It can be difficult to find the best words to use, but there are organisations that can help.



350.org is an international environmental organisation that has been working since 2009 to address the climate crisis. Its stated goal is to “end the use of fossil fuels and transition to renewable energy by building a global, grassroots movement of ordinary people”. The 350 in the name is their goal, the 350 parts per million (ppm) of CO₂ thought to be the safe upper limit for a stable climate. In April 2020 the weekly average has been about 416 ppm.

At the moment one campaign on their website, at 350.org/coronavirus-organizing, is “**Community Care is Greater Than the Coronavirus**” ... *“it is in these uncertain times that we realise the fragility of the interwoven systems we all depend on to survive.”* It then goes on to suggest what we (individually or as a community) might be able to do to stop the climate crisis while at the same time supporting what the authorities are doing to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.



I have supported Greenpeace since before the Rainbow Warrior was sunk in 1985, and recently received an email from them suggesting things we can do to keep our spirits up while we are restricted.

The first suggestion is to watch some of **Greenpeace's Serenity videos**. 17 segments on YouTube ranging from one to ten minutes long, showing the beauty of



the Earth in places that Greenpeace has worked. My favourite is "Ocean Memories": the world's most northerly ice music concert, at bit.ly/3bo7ExN (turn your speakers on before clicking on this link). The links to all 17 segments are to the right of the screen.

There are also links to **8 films about the environment to watch while you are self-isolating**, at bit.ly/2RTXPzY including Leonardo di Caprio's *Before the Flood* documentary.

Books, videos and links

Some suggestions of books that have got me thinking (all are still available in print online or as e-books); there is more information about them at blewburyclimateaction.com/links:

- "The Future we choose", Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac, Manilla Press, 2020.
- "Wilding" by Isabella Tree, Picador 2018.
- "How bad are bananas?", by Mike Berners-Lee, Profile books, 2010.

There are more books, links to videos and TED talks on the BCA website: blewburyclimateaction.com. Email info@blewburyclimateaction.com with your suggestions of more books, etc. that interested or influenced you, or post your ideas and comments on facebook.com/groups/BlewburyClimateAction. If you do this I will add them to the Reading and Links page of the BCA website.

Jo Lakeland

Hedge laying

During the winter a hedge along Pilgrims Way was laid by our hedge-laying group (photo at right).



Following that, the very sparse hedge along the western side of Tickers Folly Field (along the footpath up to the Chalk Pit, photo below) was laid where possible and more trees and bushes planted in the gaps. In addition, the community orchard trees have been mulched with rotted leaves provided by Alex Musson.

John Ogden, Sean Morris and Eric Eisenhandler



Wildlife Corridor

Three years ago Sustainable Blewbury started this project, planting trees and restoring hedges from above the Chalk Pit along the track to Cow Lane and eventually Woodway, and so creating a corridor for wildlife.

In 2017 SB planted 100 trees from the Woodland Trust near the Chalk Pit. Last winter that area was revisited, and about 80 existing and new saplings were fitted with taller deer guards.

In 2018 Beeswax Dyson Farming, the owners of the Churn Estate and to whom we are very grateful, planted a very large number of hedging bushes and trees along the track to Cow Lane (photo below), to restore the old hedge that had been there. However, some of the bushes and trees died in the dry summers of 2018 and 2019. In March 2020 the Beeswax hedge was given a thorough spring-clean by some of the SB hedge-laying group. About 100 trees obtained by Karen Forman from the Woodland

Trust replaced some of the dead ones, protective spirals were cleared of grass, bamboo stakes replaced where necessary and a few old, large hawthorns pruned. However, competition from grasses, nettles and other 'weeds' is intense.



A number of ecological projects are underway on the Beeswax land, including rewilding, biomass, bird-nesting programmes and wildlife strips to encourage more pollinators. The first of these, in conjunction with Natural England and Sustainable Blewbury, involves the conversion of the seven hectare field immediately east of Cow Lane and north of Frying Pan Wood into a wildlife area (it is currently growing cereal). This autumn, half of the field will be drilled with wildflower seed and the other half with wild bird cover (wheat, barley, rye, etc.). This area will be open to everyone as long as dogs are kept under control in order not to disturb the nesting birds in particular.

Sean Morris, Alex Musson, John Ogden and Eric Eisenhandler

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Short articles and links

Repair cafes ... and planned obsolescence?

Repair cafes started over ten years ago in the Netherlands, at a time when people became concerned about the growing amount of electrical (WEEE) waste being thrown away, but soon they were also helping people to repair all sorts of things that would have been thrown away. Repair cafes are not competing with professional repair specialists – many of the people who visit repair cafes say that they normally throw away broken items because paying to have them repaired is often too expensive. This video

(bit.ly/3ahYlbZ) shows Martine Postma, the lady who started the repair café movement, at a large Dutch repair cafe. (It does have subtitles!) Repair cafes are now held on every continent, and there are six regular repair cafes run by sustainability groups less than seven miles from Blewbury.



Unfortunately, there is now even stronger concern about the amount of modern electronic equipment being thrown away, because the majority of mobile phones and even many computers are not repairable. It is even impossible to replace the battery in some mobile phones that cost more than £500! “Last year alone, more than 50m tonnes of e-waste was generated globally, half of it being TVs, computers, smartphones and tablets, and with only around 20% of it officially recycled”. But hopefully things will improve. Recently the European Commission announced plans aimed at ensuring that a range of products will be “recyclable, repairable and designed to last longer” as part of a plan to halve waste across the EU by 2030. And the “#Right to Repair” campaign is spreading.

The Coronavirus crisis has brought our need for greater resilience and sustainability into sharp focus. A lot of modern electronic equipment now comes from China, and because Chinese manufacturing was affected first, there was a significant increase in the demand for used equipment – whether it was laptops that schools were trying to redistribute so that pupils could work at home, or hardware so that people could communicate remotely. Unfortunately much of this equipment is difficult to reuse ... “You can buy the hardware, but you don’t have the necessary permissions to use it without getting some kind of new service agreement.” See bit.ly/2zaXJ0j for more on this subject.



Jo Lakeland

Are Plastic bags all bad ... or is it us who use them badly?

This is an example of how the media go for a short snappy phrase because a complex message doesn’t have the same impact. The trouble is that it can then produce incorrect results.

The plastic carrier bag has become a symbol for the problems caused by plastic pollution. But according to the family of the man who created it, Sten Gustaf Thulin, his design was supposed to help the planet and he'd be shocked and upset to see what it's become. Watch the BBC video at bbc.in/3eqXdv2 (and also more short videos about our environment).

Jo Lakeland

UK’s first ever Tiny Forest planted in Witney

On March 14th the environmental charity Earthwatch Europe and Witney Town Council partnered to plant the UK’s first-ever Tiny Forest in Witney. They did this as a joint response to the climate and ecological emergency.

Witney council workers and local volunteers helped to plant 600 native trees, including oak, birch, elder, crab apple and blackthorn in an area the size of a tennis court (200 m²) in the middle of a housing estate! The entire community will be able to use the forest, sitting on the benches, being within the trees – while the trees are absorbing CO₂ emissions, improving air quality, reducing the risk of flooding and shielding a residential street from the noise of the A40.



Ecological crisis

Earthwatch Europe's senior research lead, Victor Beumer: “At a time when it seems impossible to overcome the enormous challenge of the climate and ecological crisis, tiny forests offer a collaborative natural solution with far-reaching benefits.” The charity expects the Witney tiny forest to attract more than 500 species of animals and plants, including numerous kinds of insects, birds and butterflies. Earthwatch say that scientific modelling shows that the tiny forest to have a much bigger effect on the climate and environment than a conventionally planted forest. See bit.ly/3apOXZd for details.

Methodology

The UK's first Tiny Forest is based on forest management methodology developed in the 1970s by Japanese botanist Dr Akira Miyawaki, and revisited in the 2010s. Over 3,000 forests have been planted worldwide using Miyawaki's methodology and now Earthwatch has planted its first UK Tiny Forest at Witney, with the support of IVN Nature Education, a Dutch organisation that has successfully planted close to 100 Tiny Forests in the Netherlands, which has a similar climate to Britain's.



Established Tiny Forest in the Netherlands

Earthwatch was hoping to follow this pilot scheme with a second one, which would have been planted in Oxford in partnership with Oxford City Council at the end of March, but I fear this is yet another scheme that has had to be postponed.

Images from i-news and Earthwatch. Read more at bit.ly/3cBmls6 and watch Shubhendu Sharma, CEO of Afforestt give an illustrated TED talk about Tiny Forests in 2016 at bit.ly/2KjyZoZ.

Jo Lakeland

A glimmer of clear, clean air

The current situation is not like anything any of us has ever experienced, and has temporarily eclipsed news of Brexit and of climate change (still an emergency of course!). It is of course too early to know much lasting change will result from this crisis. But the present shutdown of so many normal activities is providing an inadvertent, otherwise impossible experiment on air pollution.

Empty roads, fewer diesel trains and planes, and much less industrial activity and electricity generation have had a dramatic effect on air pollution, especially in cities. There have been big reductions in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate pollution. Locally, NO₂ levels have more than halved. There will, of course, also be a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions but we may not see that data for some time, and how much long-term change occurs is an important issue. There's an interesting article expanding on many points that could not be included in this article here: bit.ly/34xvO6g.

Paul Monks, professor of air pollution at the University of Leicester and former chair of the government's science advisory committee on air quality, predicted there will be important lessons to learn. "Are we looking at what we might see in the future if we can move to a low-carbon economy? Not to denigrate the loss of life, but this might give us some hope from something terrible. To see what can be achieved." He also said: "It seems entirely probable that a reduction in air pollution will be beneficial to people in susceptible categories, for example some asthma sufferers. ... It could reduce the spread of disease. A high level of air pollution exacerbates viral uptake because it inflames and lowers immunity."

One of the largest drops in pollution levels was over the Chinese city of Wuhan. According to NASA, NO₂ levels across eastern and central China have been 10–30% lower than normal. NO₂ levels also dropped in South Korea, which has long struggled with high emissions from its large fleet of coal-fired power plants and also from nearby industrial facilities in China.

Changes over **northern Italy** are particularly striking because smoke from a dense cluster of factories tends to get trapped against the Alps. I have been to Milan in winter, when visibility was 100–200 metres on a sunny day and there was black soot on cars, and I have also driven across northern Italy from Milan towards Turin in winter, in continuous grey murk.

Since Italy went into lockdown, NO₂ levels in Milan and other parts of northern Italy have fallen by about 40%. “It’s quite unprecedented,” said Vincent-Henri Peuch, director of the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service. “In the past, we have seen big variations for a day or so because of weather. But no signal on emissions that has lasted so long.” This is probably due to reduced activity in Italy’s most industrialised region as well as a huge reduction in road traffic. There’s a video clip from the Copernicus satellite at bit.ly/3eaBSWL.

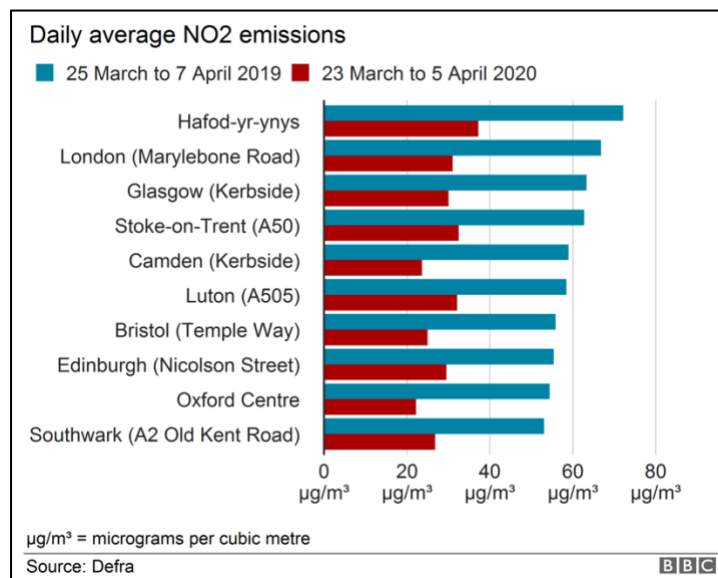


Milan Cathedral

Air pollution in parts of **India** has dropped to record lows following the Covid-19 lockdown. Twenty two of the 30 most polluted cities in the world are in India. However, with the Covid-19 lockdown pollution levels in Delhi have decreased to some of the lowest levels of NO₂ ever recorded in spring. Particulate matter (PM_{2.5})*[□] dropped from 165 µg/m³ on 21 March, a level considered unhealthy to everyone, to 64 µg/m³ on 29 March, which is considered moderate or acceptable. (Two decades ago I arrived in Delhi in winter, with a cough, and the terrible air quality made it worse.)

Similarly, in Jaipur air pollution dropped over the same period to 48 µg/m³. There are some very striking before/after photo comparisons, notably of Delhi, here: bit.ly/2xctPZ3.

Big effects have also been seen in many **European cities**, including the **UK** where the biggest reductions (up to 60% for NO₂, mainly from car exhaust) have been in London, Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff. The government has called for experts to present evidence from the reduced pollution to support improved air quality management. The figure below shows some examples from the UK. (The A472 in Hafodyrynys in Wales, has some of the highest levels of NO₂ outside of central London. The local authority is planning to buy some of the houses along that stretch of road for 150% of their unsurprisingly low market value, so that they can demolish them. See bbc.in/34JWVuO.)



In addition to providing an ‘experiment’ in cleaning the air (probably only temporarily), air pollution affects the Covid-19 pandemic. There is some evidence that people in polluted areas are far more likely to die from the coronavirus than those living in cleaner areas. A study, by researchers at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health in Boston, analysed air pollution and Covid-19 deaths in the

* PM_{2.5} is one of the most health-damaging forms of air pollution. It measures the quantity of tiny particles, less than 0.0025 mm in size, in the air. The units are micrograms per cubic metre of air. In the UK PM_{2.5} is mainly caused by particulates from old, unfiltered diesel engines, dust from tyre and road wear, and smoke from log burners. For more information: cambridgemask.com/blog/6-things-you-need-to-know-about-pm2-5.

United States. “We found that an increase of only 1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ [a very small change] in PM2.5 is associated with a 15% increase in the Covid-19 death rate.”

A study focusing on Italy, published in the journal *Environmental Pollution*, said: “We conclude that the high level of pollution in northern Italy should be considered an additional co-factor of the high level of lethality recorded in that area.” It noted that northern Italy was one of Europe’s most polluted areas and that the Covid-19 death rate reported up to 21 March in the northern Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna regions was about 12%, compared with 4.5% in the rest of Italy.

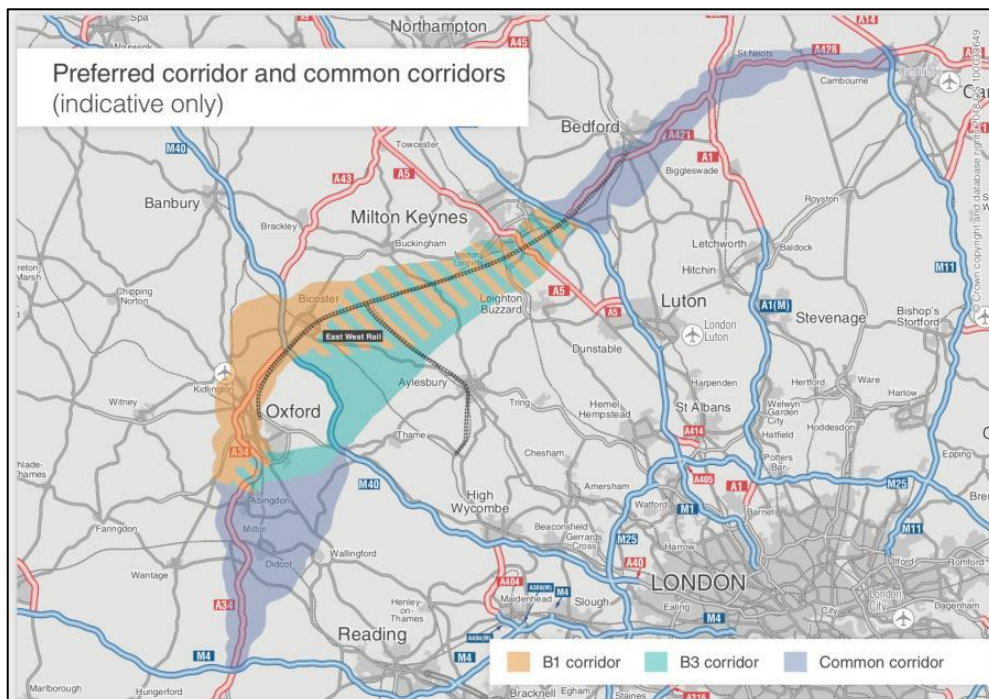
More information at: bit.ly/3eaLals; bit.ly/34oNa5n; ncas.ac.uk; bbc.in/39TFb1a and bit.ly/3a4PbF7.

Eric Eisenhandler

OxCam Expressway on hold

The government’s 2020 budget was presented before the huge costs associated with the Covid-19 pandemic appeared on the scene. Although the proposed Oxford–Cambridge Expressway was not mentioned explicitly, the budget statement does mention development of the Oxford–Milton Keynes–Bedford–Cambridge ‘Arc’ as a key economic priority, along with the Oxford to Cambridge East West Railway. You might ask why priority for this sort of development isn’t directed at a region of the country that needs it more than the prosperous south-east of England.

Along with the budget’s ‘Red Book’, there is a separate, detailed document spelling out the government’s ‘Road Investment Strategy 2: 2020–2025’. This has some surprises. It says: “*Oxford to Cambridge Expressway – the Oxford-Cambridge Arc is already home to some of the most productive towns and cities in the country. ... The Government has investigated the potential for **a new high-quality link road between the M1 and M40 which could support this growth and examined the costs and benefits of a range of options, taking account of the views of local authorities and residents in the Arc. We are now pausing further development of the scheme while we undertake further work on other potential road projects that could support the Government’s ambition for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, and benefit people who live and work there.***” [Emphasis added.]



The headline from this is that the Expressway has been paused, but not cancelled. But in addition, instead of talking about a link from the A34 south of Oxford, it is now only discussing a link between the M40 and the M1 (which at present is the A43, a fairly good road strewn with roundabouts).

Why this shift has taken place may be partly in the comment about the views of local authorities and residents. Since last year’s transformative local elections Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council have all said

they are now opposed to the original Expressway proposal. The main reasons are the lack of democratic consultation on the original proposal, the huge amount of new housing (which with existing proposals would more than double the number of houses in Oxfordshire), the failure to consider whether new roads are consistent with achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and the damage the expressway would do to the rural environment.

On the climate change issue, the new railway line sounds better than a road that, like almost all new roads, would attract new traffic. However, the East West Railway has refused to commit to electric trains, which would be the obvious green choice. In June last year, I asked them whether the trains would be electric, their entire reply was: *“Rail is one of the most sustainable modes of transport and eases pressure on road networks. Therefore, our decisions around rail stock will be made with several factors in mind, including environmental considerations.”* The sustainability page of their website says nothing about how the trains will be powered (eastwestrail.co.uk/the-project/sustainability).

My own guess is that the economic crisis caused by Covid-19 might convince the government to drop the expressway entirely. For more information see: noexpressway.org; bit.ly/3b4eYyg; and bit.ly/2V5K5nN.

Eric Eisenhandler

Plastic-eating bacteria to dispose of polyurethane?

Millions of tonnes of polyurethane (PU) are produced each year. You probably have trainers or shoes with polyurethane soles. It's also used to make foam – cushions for seats, carpet underlay and rigid insulation, for example, as well as the hard plastic wheels on shopping trolleys, and many other things. Most PU ends up in landfill as it is difficult to recycle, but most carpet underlay is made from re-processed PU foam. When PU breaks down it can release toxic and carcinogenic chemicals



However, scientists have now found a bacterium that can feed on the toxic plastic, breaking it down and using it as food to give it energy. However, it's still early days and the scientists, at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research in Leipzig, Germany think it might take 10 years of development to be able to use this new strain of *Pseudomonas* bacteria to break down PU on a large scale. For more details see bit.ly/34sRikU, bit.ly/3c8xu8W (for the chemistry-minded, this includes a link to the original paper), bit.ly/2VahkX7, and bit.ly/2yeFAOq.



Eric Eisenhandler

Fossil fuel investment by banks continues

In order to achieve net-zero carbon, we simply must stop using fossil fuels. Reserves of oil and gas already identified contain much more fuel than is safe to burn if we want to limit climate change. Yet the oil and gas companies continue to explore for new sources.

Many big investors, such as public institutions and pension funds, have stopped investing in oil and gas companies, selling off shares worth trillions of dollars. A recent example is the UK's Parliament pension fund (bit.ly/2yfShIZ). Yet some of the world's largest investment banks have funnelled more than £2.2 trillion (million million) into fossil fuels since the 2015 Paris agreement, prompting warnings they are failing to respond to the climate crisis.

A report called *Banking on Climate Change 2020*, compiled by Rainforest Action Network, BankTrack, Indigenous Environmental Network, Oil Change International, Reclaim Finance, and the US Sierra Club was published in March. The US bank JP Morgan Chase, whose economists warned that the climate crisis threatens the survival of humanity in February, has been the largest financier of fossil fuels since the Paris agreement, providing over £220 bn of financial services to extract oil, gas and coal. Alongside JP Morgan Chase, the US banks Wells Fargo, Citi and Bank of America dominate financing for fossil fuels, accounting for nearly a third of the £2.2 tn of financial services since the Paris agreement, according to the report. See bit.ly/2K7g54z.

Although the last year has seen many investment banks announce restrictions on financing coal, Arctic oil and gas, and tar sands extraction, the report warns that the business practices of financial institutions are not aligned with the Paris agreement. The report said that since the Paris agreement, big banks overall have *increased* their funding to companies with significant Arctic oil and gas reserves.



Barclays, which has been under increasing investor pressure over its environmental stance, has been the top European financier of fossil fuels in the last four years, investing \$118 bn in fossil fuel companies since the Paris agreement. Last year, Barclays was the largest financier of Arctic oil and gas. A group of influential shareholders are now urging the bank to phase out lending to fossil fuel companies, and have filed a resolution to be voted on at Barclays' AGM in May. Barclays now says they aim to be zero-carbon by 2050 (see their statement at [bit.ly/2xg9jEo](https://www.barclays.com/press/2020/05/20200512-barclays-climate-statement)). A Barclays spokesperson said: "We are working hard to help tackle climate change including facilitating £34.8 bn of social and environmental financing last year. We continue to engage with ShareAction and other stakeholders on how we can make further progress." We must wait and see if that is just 'greenwash'.



Fracking has been the focus of intense business activity by investment banks since the Paris agreement, with JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo and Bank of America leading more than £240 bn of financing, much of it linked to the Permian basin in Texas.

The Royal Bank of Canada and Toronto Dominion led financing for tar sands crude oil projects in Alberta, north-west Canada, which have caused widespread damage to ecosystems.

Johan Frijns, director of BankTrack, an NGO which monitors the activities of major financial institutions, said it was time for banks to commit to phasing out financing for all new fossil fuel projects. "In the last year, banks have been queuing up to proclaim support for the goals of the Paris Agreement. Yet the data in *Banking on Climate Change 2020* show these laudable pledges making little difference, and bank financing for the fossil fuel industry continuing to lead us to the climate abyss. ... It is high time banks recognised that reaching the Paris climate goals requires an immediate end to finance for all new fossil fuel projects, and a rapid phase out of existing fossil finance. This should be the Global Glasgow Goal for all banks."

Action suggested by Greenpeace: Stop Barclays funding the climate emergency. As already mentioned, Barclays has been the top European financier of fossil fuels in the last four years, while at the same time publicising its ambition is to become a net-zero bank by 2050. Use [bit.ly/2zjG0Us](https://www.greenpeace.org/uk/campaigns/stop-barclays-funding-the-climate-emergency/) to help you to phrase an email to Barclays' CEO and tell him to stop bankrolling climate breakdown. Click on the link "Email now" in the large green panel. It will lead you to a letter you can edit before sending. *You will not be committing yourself to do anything else and you do not automatically become a member of Greenpeace.*

Eric Eisenhandler

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The Sustainable Blewbury newsletter is produced and edited by Jo Lakeland and Eric Eisenhandler

In more normal times we have a wide-ranging programme of activities in and around the village. Participating is fun and can make a positive contribution to village life and the local environment.

If you'd like to get involved, or to receive our free bimonthly Newsletter, email us at

info@sustainable-blewbury.org.uk or phone Eric at 01235 850558.

