

Warrington's schools show the way!

The consequences of climate change are something which will have the greatest impact on young people in the future, and it was very appropriate that a Greener Schools Conference should be the first official event to be held by Warrington's recently formed Climate Emergency Commission. It was also very appropriate that the event should be organised by Louis Groarke, Warrington's Chief Youth Officer. Louis who recently had his 17th birthday was recently appointed as vice-chair of the Climate Emergency Commission to help ensure that the voices of young people could be heard as effectively as possible.

The Greener Schools Conference was held on 26th February at the historic Walton Hall and was attended by almost 40 people in total including pupils from a mixture of 9 different primary and secondary schools together with members of staff, speakers, council officers and councillors, including the Deputy Leader of the Council, Cllr Cathy Mitchell and Cllr Tony Higgins the Cabinet Member for Community, Neighbourhood and Leisure.

After a buffet lunch, the conference was introduced to an eager audience by Cllr Judith Guthrie, the Cabinet Member for Environment, Public Protection and Climate Change. This was followed by a comprehensive presentation by Dr Marcus Swann from Low Carbon Lymm on what climate change is, what is causing it, and some of the impacts that it is having across the world. There was intense focus on the subject in the auditorium, and it wasn't surprising that the workshops that followed were enthusiastic and led to a wide range of ideas being put forward on how each of the schools could further expand on the work already being undertaken to lower their carbon footprint.



The breadth of activities that our schools in Warrington are already involved in is impressive and included activities from litter-picking, use of motion-sensing lights, use of recyclable plastic bottles, recycling of waste, making homemade chutney, tending an allotment, walking to school and planting trees. One of the most inventive things which pupils at Bradshaw Community Primary School had done was to build a greenhouse out of waste recyclable bottles, not only making excellent use of a highly

problematic waste material, but providing the opportunity for growing their own vegetables under cover. During the workshops, participants came up with a multitude of other ideas including the elimination of single-use plastics, composting of food waste, installation of automatic taps, and installation of LED lights. Some other very original ideas included one from Cardinal Newman Catholic High School, which was to build a sensory garden using mainly recycled materials. Chapelford Village Primary had the idea of hosting a "ride to school" challenge.

Following the workshop, Cllr Dr David Ellis, the Chair of Warrington Climate Emergency Commission, gave a presentation on the problem of single use plastics. This looked at what constitutes single use plastics first and participants were asked to come up with a range of examples. They showed that they understand the problem extremely well. They then looked at the problems caused by these highly non-degradable



Microplastic particles

materials including the gradual production of microplastics that can enter our food-chain and then heard about the Plastic Free Warrington initiative which is signing up schools and businesses to commit to reducing single-use plastics. Since the conference two schools have already signed up to the scheme and more are expected to follow.

The final presentation of the day came from the Mersey Gateway Trust and was given by David Colbourne and described the excellent conservation work which has been carried out on the River Mersey up as far as Warrington, which has transformed it from being an almost dead river due to widespread contamination with industrial effluents and raw sewage. Today it is rich in wildlife, with a wide variety of shore birds and many fish including salmon which started to return in the late 90s.



The panel of Cllrs Judith Guthrie, Tony Higgins, Cathy Mitchell and David Ellis field questions from participants

To end the day, there was a question and answer session for the panel with a wide-ranging variety of questions which would have done Question Time proud. It was very clear from the day's proceedings, that our young people are very well informed on the importance of the environment and understand the need to take action to prevent climate change. The Mersey Gateway Trust's work shows that a lot can be achieved when action is taken. Every one of the participants went away with their own personal pledge for the environment. The most common pledges involved re-use/recycling, eliminating single-use plastics, reducing travel and changing buying habits.

Warrington's first Greener Schools Conference was a great success and it was very encouraging to see young people so knowledgeable and motivated. We can be confident that Warrington's future will be safe in their hands.