



Human  
Behaviour  
Change  
for Life

## Community activities in the Tillingbourne Valley

By Tillingbourne.earth

### CASE STUDY

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## Project Background

We live in a valley in Surrey that comprises several small, relatively affluent villages between two large towns. In mid-2021 several like-minded small community groups and individuals organically connected, discussed the local initiatives and started to work together towards more formal collaborations and involvement. For example, a small group of people who were regularly litter picking one of the villages came together more formally to nurture this activity as 'The Shere Garbage Gang'. A couple of villages along, and a group of parents at a small village school (including HBCL's Suz Rogers) had been working

*Words by Suz Rogers and Christian Staunskjaer*

towards encouraging more eco-minded behaviour amongst parents and the wider community and had started a column in a local newsletter called 'Planet Friendly Peaslake'. Meanwhile, local businessman and community member Christian Staunskjaer was planning an eco-outdoor cinema, to show films on environmental topics to encourage more people to change their behaviour. Another village started to hold climate emergency public meetings. A meeting was organised, common ground excitedly identified, many ideas voiced, various WhatsApp groups started, and the next meeting planned. Initial

focus was on more organised litter picks, expanding a recycling scheme run by Peaslake school, and launching the outdoor cinema.

The people involved are incredibly diverse with one thing in common – a desire to do something and not just sit back and watch the climate crisis and associated issues happen. Talking identified some people in the group as having relevant professional roles, connections and leisure interests e.g., a teacher, someone innovating eco-building and construction, a Director of an organisation running education and outreach

regarding recycling for children, a professional behaviour change consultant, local businesses and people who are very well linked and participate in community initiatives.

We are only just beginning our group and will update this case study as we go. We intend to run a survey to gain a baseline understanding of attitudes and behaviours within the community and monitor and capture changes as accurately as we can.



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# Overview of Activities Undertaken

## Activities include:

- **Recycling pods:** We want to create drop-off points in the community for some commonly used products that can't be recycled through the council home-waste collections (at first crisp packets and ink cartridges, to expand to other similar materials). The aim of these pods is also to encourage people to reduce buying these products in the first place as collecting them highlights how many are used by that family. Several members of the group visited a private waste plant centre to get a better understanding of how waste is processed and to ask the company to donate the bins to use as pods. The pods will be painted by local children to further generate interest. They will be managed by volunteers and are due to be ready by spring 2022. Wastebusters is working with us as they have considerable relevant resources for working with schools.

- **Litter picks:** a WhatsApp group was created to facilitate communication between local litter pickers – seeing pictures of the things and volume of rubbish that people are picking up brings the group closer and keeps us motivated. A more formal litter pick was arranged in early December 2021 and the volume collected was huge! Some discussion has taken place regarding the source of the litter – it is thought that much is thrown from cars and lorries – and how this could be addressed.
- **Fly tipping clearance:** the WhatsApp litter picking group has also been used to mobilise help in clearing some fly tipping (council aware).





- **Bring and take sales:** to encourage people to embrace second-hand products the group wanted to test 'bring and take sales', at first focussing on toys through the links with the local schools. Details of our experiences with the first event follows.
- **Cinema:** as described previously, several individuals are working towards launching an outdoor cinema for green films.
- **Thermal Imaging:** we will offer a free service that will provide a thermal imaging survey of people's homes to inform them of the worst areas of heat loss and allow them to consider and plan insulation. We intend to widen this to connect people with local EPC assessors who can act as a free "ask an expert" for specific advice and direction.
- **Water refill's in local shops and businesses:** several local people want to take this forward and are working with organisations such as <https://www.refill.org.uk>.
- **Hedge planting:** we are in the early stages of promoting more mixed hedge planting to replace fences in the area. A lot is being done on tree planting by others, but we felt that this is an opportunity that has potential benefits for wildlife, water attenuation and carbon sequestration... as well as collecting litter from blowing away!!
- **Green Valley Fair:** we are working on the idea of a fair on Albury Heath in the early summer that invites as many local and national sustainability-based groups to come along with a stall! Also, food suppliers that have a very clear focus on locally produced sustainably grown food. The aim is to help connect up these groups locally and raise awareness in the community. As well as stalls, we have thoughts about thought provoking installations, a green cinema film and some acoustic music around campfires!
- **Car share:** a carpool scheme is being explored.
- Lobbying local council to invest in and support a green focus.
- Much more – we are planning so much more but working on one thing at a time, building and growing the number of people involved as we go.





## A real story that illustrates what your work encompassed

A poll by the British Heart Foundation found that more than a quarter of parents admit to throwing away toys that are in perfect working order (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47868871>). In addition, toys are typically quickly loved and discarded and clutter up people's homes, with mostly plastic materials. We wanted to encourage more open mindedness about buying second hand or pre-loved and to normalise this in the community – to start a more circular economy and encourage collaborative consumption (see this TED talk on the [subject](#) ).

The first pilot 'bring and take' toy event gave us powerful insight, new perspectives, and increased motivation to do more to address the issue of the volume of unwanted toys in our community. The original plan was to hold a public event in the playground of a village school; a second school was a partner in organising the event and was going to focus on providing tea/coffee/mince pies for sale to encourage participation. We were also going to partner with a local organisation who collect warm clothes for refugees by providing a drop-off point at the event. Sadly, however, the week before the event was due to take place, Covid concerns were increasing, and we decided not to hold a public event but rather to hold a private event for the parents of the partner school instead to test the plan!

There was significant interest in the run up to the event with people within the community and the school wanting to drop off toys with the organisers. The toys were amazing quality and people were very generous in giving away toys that were often worth tens of pounds had they been sold through second-hand websites such as eBay.

When it came to the event, many people wanted to make a donation and felt bad taking toys. We explained that the point was not to involve money, rather to provide space to step away from the commercial

mindset, and to encourage and normalise second hand toys. This was typically met with people either saying things along the lines of providing examples of how they already utilise community resources to circulate toys or expressing that they had never considered acquiring toys in this way before. Many described throwing toys away in the bin when they were grown out of and some expressed surprise that toys that they had recently bought new were available in very good condition in the community for free!

#### The take-home messages from the event were:

- People were very keen to have somewhere to donate outgrown and unwanted toys to and 'supply' for an event like this was not a concern.
- Many people expressed desire to have more events like this one and future events for children's clothes or other 'themes'.
- People were very generous and happy to give and excited to take.
- We did receive many toys that were only a little broken and that could have been easily fixed. We kept these and will fix them up and offer them to people next time. We wanted to encourage acquiring pre-loved goods not put people off by picking up incomplete jigsaw puzzles or broken toys.

The event seemed to be a good way to encourage buying less new and passing things on responsibly.



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## Next steps

The group is growing quickly, and this is bringing more capacity and 'hands on deck' and also enabling smaller subgroups to be set up to work on areas of particular interest. The next steps are to expand and establish our current activities. We want to start to plan ways to measure our impact and track our journey. For example, regarding the bring and take events - we are working on a plan to capture more information about the impact of future events and about encouraging elements of a circular economy in our community as a case study for other potential groups in other areas.

We will focus on building opportunity - it has been identified that there is a lack of available points for recycling of some packaging and products. People are unwilling to go to 'the next village' to drop off items, there is a need for very local recycling points to encourage use and hence our recycling pod activity described previously.

We want to create and nurture new social norms: e.g., increased visibility of volunteer litter pickers might change awareness and potentially behaviour regarding the source of litter. We want to make second-hand goods more socially acceptable and provide opportunities to acquire preloved items locally. Ultimately, we will increase the visibility of our activities encouraging the creation of new behaviours that become habits.





## What resonated?

The way that small groups of people have come together with a common goal and 'can do' attitude has been quite remarkable. Seeing how agile organising things can be without the processes that some larger organisations have is quite interesting, and although some structure and strategy is hugely beneficial, harnessing the agility and energy of small groups of people who have the skills and capacity to make things happen is key.

## Challenges

We have had some minor challenges – the Covid pandemic has affected our projects and plans in terms of ability to have meetings, advertise the litter picks (due to changing rules regarding numbers of people allowed to meet up), hold the bring and take sales, and generally volunteers having other life priorities is a challenge.

Project website: [www.tillingbourne.earth](http://www.tillingbourne.earth)



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