

XR Banbury – Written Evidence (LBC0031)

WHO ARE WE

Extinction rebellion Banbury are a group of local residents committed to energising individuals, organisations and government to take action to deal with the climate emergency. We commissioned a survey of local residents about what they wanted to see after lockdown.

LOCKDOWN LIFE IN BANBURY

The pandemic and lockdown have made us re-think our daily lives. Many local people have been directly affected by being ill, concerned for relatives, or working under difficult and risky conditions, while others have faced isolation and loneliness in their homes. *All* of us have made changes, some of them drastic. A survey of residents of Banbury and surrounding villages has investigated how lockdown has affected us and continues to do so. Thanks to Banbury Guardian readers and indeed all who have taken the time to respond.

Only 12% of the 185 who completed the questionnaire have been furloughed, while 23% are key workers. Almost half are able to work from home some or all of the time; 30% are home-schooling children and / or caring for others, and 15% are volunteering. 12% of respondents have spent lockdown alone.

Unsurprisingly, walking is the main leisure activity, with many taking pleasure in the natural world, exploring and rediscovering footpaths, parks and canalside routes. Many of those with increased leisure time have been gardening, cooking and reading, or taking the chance to learn a new skill.

The question *Who or what has helped you most during the crisis?* produced many comments about community spirit. *Having volunteering roles made me feel valued and of help to those suffering*, said one respondent, and another: *I run a local business and have been supporting our community through these times so that has kept us going*. Another response was: *Knowing that much of it was out of my control made me focus on the things I could make a difference to*. Religious faith and prayer were frequently mentioned, as were yoga, meditation and art. Social media has been enormously beneficial, enabling us to stay in touch with friends and family and to take part in pub quizzes and reading groups.

Nearly everyone has made a change they'll stick with, such as *cooking from scratch, buying local food to reduce waste and processing and cut back our reliance on supermarkets*. Many aim to maintain new exercise regimes and to de-clutter their homes; others want to continue working reduced hours to spend more time with friends and family. A great many will carry on exploring their local area.

Asked about transport, almost half plan to walk more and a third to do more cycling, while half intend to fly less than they did before. Understandably, a

question about public transport produced a mixed response, about a quarter intending to use it less than before.

What should we learn from the pandemic? Again, the importance of community was emphasised: *There's a tremendous reserve of help in local communities; to come together as a community rather than living our lives separately in the same places.* Many have reassessed their values: *We don't need 'stuff'. What really adds value to our lives is companionship, love, and experiences; We can be far more self-sufficient than we might think, and There's a big difference between what we want and what we need.* Answers focused on the need to see beyond ourselves: *The value of community, selflessness. An understanding that while we may not feel the effects of our actions, those in more vulnerable positions may, and We are not the most important beings on the planet, which can get by perfectly well without us!* Government response to the pandemic came under criticism – *A virus is not unexpected. How could we have been so unprepared?* - and several mentioned the NHS and other key workers. *We need to appreciate the members of our community that we take for granted – NHS, retail workers, council workers, carers – people such as these keep society running but get very little recognition.* Another comment was *We have to use it as an opportunity to build a greener economy.*

The survey is conducted by Banbury Extinction Rebellion, and is still open at <https://bit.ly/BanburyLockdownSurvey> In part 2 we'll look at how people feel about their lives in lockdown and about the future.

HOW ARE BANBURY PEOPLE FEELING, AS WE START TO EMERGE FROM LOCKDOWN?

The global pandemic and lockdown has been a heart-breaking time for many, and our sympathies go out to all who have lost loved ones, suffered illness, and endured the stress of working in terrifying conditions.

But for those of us who have not been so personally afflicted, lockdown has produced a surprising number of positives. Many people are now saying there's been a silver lining in spending more time at home with family, in rediscovering the joys of gardening and slow cooking, in exploring the glorious spring countryside and finding new local paths for walking and cycling. In building links with our local community, helping and being helped by one another.

Our local survey has shown that there are as many different lockdowns as there are respondents. It has been undeniably tough for some, particularly those living alone, and those home-schooling children. These have often felt anxious, lonely, and bored. But an amazing 75% of our respondents report that their most frequent feeling is of gratitude; as one respondent puts it, she is *Feeling more relaxed and grateful for good health and many simple pleasures.* A majority report more positive emotions (being happy, purposeful, relaxed) than negative ones.

The single hardest thing, for most of us, has been isolation from friends. In contrast, the least difficult have been the restrictions on travel and shopping for non-essentials. *Consumerism can't save you. Globalised supply chains create the*

problem – both of pandemics and economic destructions. Only localised interdependency can get us through incidents like this are sentiments echoed again and again.

One respondent made links which many others hinted at: *Hearing the birds singing so loudly and appreciating the silence from lack of heavy traffic has allowed me to connect with my community and environment. It has made me think, 'How on earth did we get here?' So many people have got sucked into consumerism, 'the disease of more', when in reality we need very little.*

Answers about what people have enjoyed most during lockdown add up to a resounding vote for Nature. Reduced air pollution comes top, closely followed by pleasure in seeing more wildlife in streets and gardens, the joy of walking and cycling in traffic-free streets, and gardening. One respondent talks of time *literally to smell the roses – rediscover balance in how we live within our environment.* (In the interests of balance, we should report that *Netflix, alcohol and porn* also appear on some lists!)

When asked whether the importance of some things have changed, relative to others, during lockdown, the majority of respondents mentioned community; most important to most of us are family, friends and community.

To summarise, in the words of one of the respondents whose opinion is echoed by many others, *We have learned that people can change their behaviour quite drastically in the face of an emergency. We must try to bring about adaptations to the climate crisis which is likely to be far more drastic than the pandemic, affecting not only humans but habitats, farming and ecosystems.*

It seems the majority of us are moving forward into a more sustainable way of living, as individuals, and that we want to see leadership in system change from our government. *We need a socialist Green Industrial New Deal.*

The question, *What should the government do to be better prepared for the Climate Emergency?* produced more detailed and thoughtful replies than we have space to report, but here's a taster: *Tax animal agriculture the same way we tax alcohol. Tax frequent flyers, sanctions on fossil fuels, subsidy for renewable energy ... Provide the opportunity for people who have on-street non-allocated parking to be able to get electric cars . . . Pass a law of ecocide with strict penalties. Be transparent with the people, if they know and understand then they are more responsible.*

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