

# PRESS RELEASE

## **Community sets out to become England's first carbon neutral village**

Going carbon neutral is the aim of the Cheshire village of Ashton Hayes – a community determined to do its bit to put the brakes on global warming. At its November meeting, Ashton Hayes Parish Council agreed to embark on its '*Going Carbon Neutral*' project. This initiative will encourage all residents to think about ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and help them to take no-cost actions that should enable the village to declare itself carbon neutral in a matter of years.

“We want to show our children, grandchildren and future generations that we have done our best to stop Ashton Hayes contributing to global warming,” says Parish Council leader Naomi Deynem. She says that the idea has generated tremendous community support with many people keen to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, some volunteering to provide practical help, and others offering tracts of land for tree planting. These new woodlands would act as important carbon dioxide ‘sinks’.

“To become carbon neutral we have to assess our current emissions and then take steps to reduce them through personal energy saving and lifestyle considerations. We can't prevent all our emissions but those we do produce can be offset through local renewable energy schemes or forestry projects. Eliminating our carbon footprint will take time but we will help everyone who is willing to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions through simple, and sometimes cost-saving measures,” says Project Coordinator Garry Charnock.

The University of Chester's Environmental Task Force is also giving substantial support for the initiative. Dr. Martin Degg, Head of Geography and Development Studies, and Dr. Roy Alexander (Reader in Geography and village resident) are keen to use the project as part of the University's new Masters degree in Sustainable Development, and for work-based learning projects for undergraduates. The plan is for students to provide support with data gathering and analysis to help determine Ashton's 'baseline' carbon dioxide emissions, and to help monitor the progress of the *Going Carbon Neutral* project. In Spring 2006, a student research team will be based in the village for about six weeks to start the survey. Ashton Hayes Primary School children will also be involved in the project.

Local businesses are also chipping in with help. Helsby-based environmental consulting firm RSK ENSR has offered to plant trees and provide expert advice on sustainable development while Technical Editing Services is providing communications advice. Manley-based Euro Tree Services is also providing advice on all tree planting and examining ways of sourcing saplings. Local farmer Derek Dobson, who has already planted a new 5,800-tree 'Andrew's wood' at the edge of

the village, is also helping the project team and other major landowners around Ashton are keen to join in.

“One of the first things we shall be doing is to explain how, through a simple phone call to their energy supplier, people can opt for a green electricity supply – from renewable resources such as wind and hydropower. This puts pressure on suppliers to develop more renewables and sends a clear message that we want to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. We’ll also be taking up offers of help and advice from the Cheshire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre and the Energy saving Trust’s Local Support Team, based in Winsford, that is keen to demonstrate how energy saving actions in the home can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions,” says Charnock.

Ashton Hayes is working closely with Chester City Council, which has just signed up to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, an agreement that commits the Council to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and encouraging community involvement in the process.

“We are fortunate in Ashton Hayes in that we have a strong and enthusiastic local community, and environmentally aware people, who have already embarked on energy saving and tree planting programmes and embraced recycling. The *Going Carbon Neutral* project will go further by encouraging people to think about their future vehicle purchases, to ensure that they are fit for purpose, while producing as few emissions as possible,” says Charnock, adding, “As time goes on, we might also suggest that people also ask their employers to review how energy saving actions in the workplace could make their business more competitive while reducing emissions.”



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