

## **Ashton Hayes – Britain's first carbon neutral village?**

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you tonight on what must be the most discussed topic in England – the weather!

Mark Twain said, "Everybody **talks** about the weather but nobody does anything about it."

A few years after he said this, scientists calculated that emissions of carbon dioxide caused by the burning of fossil fuels in the industrial revolution would eventually raise the earth's temperature by 4 to 6 degrees Celsius. That was over 100 years ago – and now their predictions are becoming true.

I am sure most of you have heard about climate change and global warming. And you may have noticed that debates about climate change issues are becoming more common. That's probably because almost everyone agrees that it is happening and that the rate of change in our climate is partially due to human activity and our emissions of greenhouse gases.

- *Extreme events are becoming more frequent. We have all noticed that rainfall seems to be heavier and longer. We know glaciers are melting and snow cover is declining. And we've seen new flooding in Carlisle. Even in Ashton we notice how animals and plants are responding to an earlier spring.*
- *Sea levels are rising and are forecast to rise by almost a metre by 2100. The Arctic seas that used to be frozen over*

*for most of the year have become major shipping lanes virtually all year round.*

- *If we don't get a handle on this we will see more melting of land ice – such as the Greenland ice-cap - eventually increasing sea levels by around seven metres.*
- *We also saw how global warming caused 26,000 premature deaths in a heat wave in France two years ago.*

And we can see this year what's been happening with hurricanes such as Katrina

In the short term things will get worse as the climate has a momentum that takes about 30-50 years to change. So we WILL see a sea level change of just under a meter and it is likely that temperatures in Manchester will go up by around 5 degrees C, and winter rainfall will increase by 30% and so will the wind speeds. These changes will in turn lead to more intense weather events, bring new insects, such as mosquitoes and poisonous spiders, and the migration northwards of scorpions and other creatures.

Our Government is concerned about climate change – says it's the biggest challenge facing our planet. It warns that if we don't do anything about it, the human race could be in trouble.

We've signed up for the Kyoto Protocol and promised to reduce our emissions. As a nation we are developing alternative energy sources to fossil fuels. But the fact is that these will all take time – probably 50 or so years before they become mainstream energy sources. So we also need to try to cut our energy demand.

The good news is that many organisations are already taking climate change seriously. International companies like HSBC, AVIS and DHL have committed to becoming carbon neutral – and so has the music group Coldplay! And energy suppliers such as BP and Shell and others are developing new technologies that could reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels.

As individuals we have a responsibility to show that we also care and take actions that make our community's impact on the environment as low as possible.

In recent discussions with Manchester authorities I have found out that in the space of about one month 10,000 Mancunians have pledged to reduce their personal CO2 emissions to help the planet. These pledges and other regional activities have made me wonder if it would be possible for a small community such as Ashton Hayes to also take ownership of the issues.

So that's why I'm here tonight.

I propose that Ashton Hayes tries to become the UK's first 'carbon neutral' village – a place in which we can be proud to live and say that we are no longer contributing to climate change. If we can do this, our grandchildren will respect the fact that we tried to do something about the situation.

I have made substantial investigations about this and found that some small groups have teamed up to discuss environmental actions and there have been new build projects, but that no British village has yet formally declared that it aims to become 'carbon neutral'. Tonight Ashton Hayes could take up that challenge.

So how do we go about this in practice? First of all we need to work out our current emissions as a community, and then determine which emission reducing activities we can take to get us to the point where we can declare ourselves to be carbon neutral. That is we do not increase the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in that atmosphere.

The University of Chester is very keen to help us do this. The head of the Geography & Sustainable Development Department has told me that he will organise students to carry out the assessment surveys and computations. This will help them with studies for their Master's degree in sustainable development that is starting in 2006 and for work based learning for undergraduates.

I will also commit to the project if the Parish Council will adopt it. I am happy to do the research and produce information to help people understand what this is all about and pave the way for the baseline survey next Easter. The idea is not to publish details about individual houses, but to report how we are succeeding as a community.

I will also produce information material at regular stages to give residents guidance on actions that they might consider taking. At first we shall suggest the 'quick wins' that will make a major impact. As time goes on, we might consider taking village-wide activities, such as encouraging the use of solar panels and even small wind turbines.

Most of the things we could do, do not involve cost or much effort. For example, everyone in the village could be encouraged to change their electricity supply to green energy. This takes a few minutes, involves a phone call or letter to your current supplier, who will switch you over for no cost and no increase in your tariff. However, 8 out of 10 of people are not aware of this. There are even some suppliers such as npower offering

discounts for those who opt to be supplied with green energy. This simple action would cut Ashton's greenhouse gas emissions by about a quarter.

We can also offset our emissions by planting trees. The rule of thumb is that planting 16 broadleaf trees makes an average UK person 'carbon neutral'. I have already planted over 2000 trees on my land and people like the Dobsons have also planted a 5800-tree woodland in memory of Andrew. In the past two weeks I have spoken to several landowners who are prepared to open up their land for tree planting and found organisations willing to supply the trees for free.

We can also encourage farmers to look into the growing of energy crops such as elephant grass that can be used to fuel new types of grass-burning power stations, such as the one recently opened in Eccleshall in Shropshire, 30 miles south of here. The income generation from supplying such plants with energy crops could deliver a real income boost for farmers and help them survive in the long term.

There are other areas where we can encourage residents to think about how their purchasing decisions can affect emissions. For example, when you go to buy your next car or fridge, is it as efficient as it can be for its intended use? Going for a hybrid or high fuel economy vehicle costs less in road tax and will probably allow you access to cities that are talking about having 'green parking' zones.

In the longer term we also ask people to rethink about travel decisions – can they share cars, take trains or buses and do they realise the environmental impact of taking too many flights.

We will also encourage people to ask if their places of work are using green energy. We can provide information for their employers about this and explain that such actions have a good PR value.

I should also mention that the Government is considering ways of implementing a carbon allowance for individuals. The basic idea is that everyone gets a 'carbon' quota that is used up by the way you opt to travel by car, in planes etc. Once you have exhausted your annual quota, you will need to buy credits from people with spare allocations (such as people who do not do many miles by road or those who take fewer flights). The Government also talks about a future in which satellites might be used to identify and fine premises that are emitting too much heat to the atmosphere!

So educating our community in this way could also prepare people for some of the changes that could occur in the future.

To give you a flavour of the type of things we can do and inform people about, I have brought some information along. There are also many websites that people can see.

I should also inform the Parish Council that the scheme will attract local and possible national publicity. I know the BBC is interested in following this up and the Chester Chronicle will probably do a report. Naomi says that she has no worries about this and I am also used to dealing with the Press. I also suspect that other villages will want to follow our lead, once they see a sign that Ashton is striving to be a Carbon Neutral village.

I've done quite a bit of legwork in the past month and have already been given the following offers of support. I have to say that the response has been tremendous.

**The University of Chester** is and its Environmental Task Force chaired by Prof. Cynthia Burek, is VERY keen to adopt the project from a monitoring standpoint and supervise the carbon neutral assessment and calculations to verify when we have achieved carbon neutral status. The methodology they develop in Ashton could then be used by other communities.

**The Energy Saving Trust Local Support Team** is a Government Funded organisation that is trying to tackle climate change, and has told me that it is very keen to adopt the project as has said that if we give to go ahead tonight, they will give us full support and bring in Chester City Council, with whom they have strong links. The coordinator, Eric Whitworth will also help us to get guest speakers, information and free consultancy for local businesses and schools on how they can reduce their energy costs while cutting emissions. They will also run a 500-word article in their next national newsletter and circulate this around government departments.

**Ashton Hayes primary school** is very keen to be involved. Pauline was at a meeting last week and could tell us more.

**The Scotts** own 140 acres of land around Ashton and are keen environmentalists. They have told me that they are keen to be involved and think that the publicity generated community-based effort will help all local farmers in their dealings with government agencies.

**The Dobsons** of Village Farm, Church Road who own about 200 acres around Ashton, have already planted 5800 trees and are happy to give advice on planting woodland and will consider extending Andrew's Wood to further help the Carbon Neutral project. Mr Dobson says he will contact his land agent and find out about grants for tree planting.

**The Ryders** are keen to plant trees in their field near Dunn's Lane. Alan is also Chairman of RSK ENSR, an environmental consulting firm, and he is keen to provide expertise and support towards the project.

**The Johnstons** of Ashton Hall Farm say they will consider planting trees in their field adjacent to Kelsall Road.

**Simon and Tommy Walton** MD of Euro Tree Services, Manley, will provide advice on tree planting and ask Powergen if it will pay for the planting of young trees.

Producers for **BBC Radio 4** have expressed an interest in covering the scheme.

Anne and myself will provide design support and help to write and print the information materials for the scheme and handle the publicity issues. We will also extend our tree planting and make a long term commitment to coordinating the programme.

Now I'd like to invite your comments and questions about my proposal.

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For more information about the *Going Carbon Neutral Project* contact

**Garry Charnock, Project Coordinator**  
**01829 752714**  
**Mob: 07968 063624**  
**Email: Charnock@t-e-s.co.uk**

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Useful websites relating to these issues

[http://www.npower.com/At\\_home/Juice-clean\\_and\\_green/About\\_Juice.html](http://www.npower.com/At_home/Juice-clean_and_green/About_Juice.html)



<http://www.uswitch.com/>

<http://www.est.org.uk/>

<http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/climate/>

**Chester City Council Nottingham Declaration Information**

**Contact:**

**Jean Briffett on 01244 402455**

**or email**

**[j.briffett@chester.gov.uk](mailto:j.briffett@chester.gov.uk)**

**<http://www.chestercc.gov.uk/>**

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