

## **SEPTEMBER UPDATE: A surge in community activity and support**

We have seen a considerable amount of activity following the end of the summer vacation period. The latest news is that we have set the date for our **Grass Roots conference on Carbon Neutrality - Saturday 14th April 2007** at the University of Chester. We are now asking some of the small communities we know to come along and share experiences. We might even throw a party in the village if people are keen to join in with us (email us if you are interested in attending). Thanks to Claire Lewis and Tracey Todhunter for volunteering to coordinate all conference activity.

On the technical front, Chester County Council Planning Committee has **approved our Windsave turbine for the school and the installation of a wall-mounted solar panel** (from Solartwin, Chester). This is excellent news for the village as we will all be able to see and hear the turbine and decide if it might be appropriate for our house.

More residents are also asking about solar thermal panels and having 4 new ones now installed encourages others to call in and ask about their performance and cost. We expect an increase in uptake in the coming months.

We have also been pleased by the reaction of other 'grass roots' movements to our short lecture about our project. This week the Westminster Park residents forum (covering 1200 houses close to the centre of Chester) voted to set up its own 'going carbon neutral project' at the end of our talk. We are also delighted that the Director of one of our sponsor companies (M&M Communications) has agreed to help us meet the growing demand for our talk. Last week he presented our ideas to the Matlock Carbon Neutral Forum and this has generated lots of interest and follow ups from others. Dr Roy Alexander and Garry Charnock also gave a talk to the Puddington Society, near Chester. This is a very active group that is committed to improving the environment. They are now looking to see what action they can take. The meeting also inspired local photographer Ian Southerin to offer to photograph the activities in Ashton Hayes and put on a photographic exhibition and make a historic record.

We hope to have this exhibition at the same time as we launch the world premier of our film that we are making with the help of the DEFRA grant. We are recording many events and interviews with sponsors. In the next month we shall cover the Chester City CRed launch on 12th October, which was inspired by our project, and also interviewing Prof. This will make Chester the first city in the world to give all its residents a personal pathway towards carbon neutrality. The innovative step is being supported by a £10,000 donation from local environmental consultancy business RSK ENSR that has been a leading supporter of the Ashton Hayes project.

As part of our film making we shall also interview Tim Wheeler, Vice-Chancellor of The University of Chester, that is giving us so much technical and admin support. In addition, we are meeting with the Robert Davis, the M.D. of EA Technologies - a locally based research company that is offering to donate all its carbon offsets from business flights to Ashton Hayes.

DEFRA has encouraged us to consider offsetting our emissions in order to help us go carbon neutral. So last week the Parish Council voted to try to set up a local offset scheme whereby those who are willing can donate a small fee to a village carbon

neutral fund, to offset the impact of flights and other activities. Our aim would be to use this fund to finance community renewable energy schemes. A BBC producer, Tom Kenyon, arrived last week to talk to about the possibility of making a film about our actions. Tom held a half-day seminar with around 15 people who are active in the project team. He suggested that we might be able to set up a funding system using our mobile phones as a method of payment. So we are going to look into this idea - if there are any mobile phone companies interested in helping us set a scheme up, we'd like to talk!

A couple of other things have also arisen this month. Barry Cooney, the landlord of our local pub, The Golden Lion, has decided that he will try to make his pub **the first in England to go Carbon Neutral**. So he has written to the owners, Punch Taverns, to ask for support. It will be a challenge to make the pub carbon neutral! Jon Dison, from Earthborn paints, has offered to paint a village building with climate friendly paint that gives off no VOCs. Local TV production company, Rapport TV, is also offering film and video support.

Cheshire Highways has now granted some money (£5000 we believe) to help us progress our plans to build a safe footpath to nearby Mouldsworth Station - that is a major step in the right direction if we are going to get out of our cars and use the train.

We are planning a 'green energy' clinic in the Golden Lion soon. Several people have kindly volunteered to help people use information from organisations such as uswitch, to change over to a green energy supply for the same price as their current supplies. If they bring along their latest bill, we'll help them phone suppliers and change over while they have a drink in the pub.

The Parish Council was also provided with a £75,000 loan from Chester City Council to enable us to snap up a large field next to the village. We've been trying to buy land for years to develop a recreational area and we finally achieved it. We think that the 'go-getting' attitude and support of our community helped to secure these funds at the 11th hour. So there are spin offs from the carbon neutral project.

There are lots of other activities going on and there is a buzz in the village. We are all a little concerned that we are still having tea on our lawns and barbecues at the end of September! Is this the hottest September on record?