



working locally to make a difference

From the editor

It's been a busy few months for Sustainable Wallingford and we have hardly been out of the local press. In March alone we ran three events: a SwapShop, a market stall, and an open meeting on community coppicing. We've also been working with other like-minded people and organisations in the area on sustainability initiatives.

New members are signing up at each event, so if this is the first time you have received a Sustainable Wallingford newsletter, welcome. We hope you find it interesting – and maybe will be inspired to get further involved in some of our future activities.

Sustainable Wallingford groups

Coming soon: 18 April New Climate Change group

The media is constantly reporting the serious threats posed by climate change. It gives us heated debates over renewable energy versus nuclear power, reports on the massive cutbacks of CO₂ emissions needed, and tells us how little time we have left for doing it – but very little is said about what we can actually do about it. We hear about how enormous the problem is and how close we are to the tipping point, but how can anything be done if no one takes the first steps?

I would like to try to set up another Sustainable Wallingford action group – a climate change group – for concerned individuals who are interested in coming together to find solutions at an individual and local level. My hope is that together we can arrive at our own tipping point:

the point at which sustainable initiatives make their way into the mainstream and public pressure builds up enough to encourage politicians to act swiftly on this issue.

If you are interested, find out more by coming to a meeting at 7.30pm on Tuesday 18th April at 13 Castle Street, Wallingford (the cottage of the Friends Meeting House). If you have any questions before then, you can call me on 01491 837 835. Hopefully together we can turn this source of anxiety into an opportunity to engage creatively with others and our environment. I look forward to seeing you.

Karen Bush

Schools Action Group

We've been working on a range of initiatives with local schools to raise awareness of sustainability and support action for change. This has included working with students from Wallingford School to plan and run assemblies for the local primary schools – the first round focused on waste, the second on Fair Trade. We've run stalls in the local primary schools, with support from SODC, to provide information and practical help with recycling, and we've taken part in school Christmas and summer fairs – making of our legendary 'squonky tubes' and other musical delights from waste materials is a lasting memory!

Our current focus for schools work is local food – we are part of a team planning a county-wide training session to support primary teachers in exploring local food issues, and we'll be offering local schools an assembly to tie in with this. Continuing the local food theme,

Sustainable Wallingford's Food Group is working with Fir Tree School to develop a vegetable garden to produce their own food – what better way to embed sustainability in the school curriculum, reduce food miles and provide a healthy diet?

The District Council is shaping its plans for supporting young people and has invited us to be part of the consultation on its draft youth strategy. We are looking forward to this and to further involvement with local schools, so we can work together to support children and young people in making a difference, both locally and globally.

If you'd like to join the Schools Action Group, or find out more, contact Louise Robinson on 835420 or louiserobinson@waitrose.com.

Louise Robinson

Waste Group

Over 200 people attended the latest SwapShop on 4th March, taking away about 390 kg which was saved from landfill. Computer equipment, batteries, toner and ink cartridges and tinfoil were also collected for recycling, along with mobile phones, Tetrapaks, light bulbs, fluorescent tubes, tools and paint. The next SwapShop will be on 10th June.

The group is currently discussing with Bunkfest how we can work together again this year to improve recycling during the festival (1st–3rd September).

Local Sourcing Group

If you were shopping in Wallingford on Saturday 11th March, you might have seen members of the Local Sourcing Group braving the cold in the Market Square. The market stall was part of their 'Grow your own' project – with free home-made soup making the point about the benefits of local produce.

The group were able to chat to passers

by about the benefits of 'growing your own' and how easy it really is. An eye-catching display of leeks, parsnips, carrots, potatoes and squashes proved how much you can do even in winter. We hope to hold more 'Soup in the Square' events in the future.

The Local Sourcing Group is also helping a local school to 'grow their own', through a school garden project at Fir Tree School. The group was recently successful in applying for a grant for the school garden project from npower, who run Didcot Power Station. They have awarded £500 to the project, which will help to buy a shed. See next article for more about the project and how you can get involved.



Sustainable Wallingford working with others

Vegetable garden at Fir Tree Junior School

This January, Fir Tree Junior School and Sustainable Wallingford began a vegetable garden at the school. In the garden, the children are learning and having fun, while helping to produce fresh food for their own school dinners.

Project Coordinator Sam Settle says: 'With this garden, Wallingford is taking another step towards more sustainable living by reducing food miles (the distance food must travel to reach the school) and therefore reducing fossil fuel usage and greenhouse gas emissions.

'The garden will help raise awareness at the school and in the wider community of how our lifestyles can have a more positive impact on the planet. In the

longer term, we hope to integrate students' activities in the garden so that they dovetail with the curriculum. So the project will be helping to nurture the gardeners of the future.

'There are a number of ways in which you can get involved in this exciting project. For example, we need gardeners! Over the next few months, we will be completing the basic structure of the garden, and doing more planting of crops. We need volunteers to help with gardening work on Fridays. It doesn't matter if you can work all of, or only part of the day; you just need to be able to commit to coming along regularly.'

'If gardening isn't for you, we also need people to open up the greenhouse for ventilation each morning and close it in the evening during weekends and other days when school is not in session. Looking further ahead, we hope that there will also be scope for volunteers to get involved in the educational aspects of the garden.'

If you would like to be part of the team working on this worthwhile community project, please ring the Project Coordinator, Sam Settle, on 01491 838 054.

Wallingford Business Recycling Project (WBRP)

Sustainable Wallingford has recently been involved in a local partnership project funded by WRAP, the government-funded agency promoting sustainable waste management. The project brings together CESH (Centre for Environmental Studies in the Hospitality Industry), Oxford County Council, Grundon and Oxfordshire Community Action Groups with the aim of encouraging small and medium sized enterprises (SME's) to increase their recycling rates. Although domestic collections encourage householders to separate their refuse into recyclable and non-recyclable waste, the same is not currently true of trade waste collections, where all non-toxic waste goes to landfill.

The project in Wallingford is one of four pilots taking place around the country. Each is slightly different, the aim being to develop a model that can be applied to other towns.

In Phase 1 of the project a questionnaire was sent by post to 563 SME's in the greater Wallingford area, asking for details of their trade waste quantities and disposal arrangements and any recycling they undertook. A seven-strong team – five of them recruited through Sustainable Wallingford, and two from the Witney Community Action Group – followed this up with personal visits to 260 businesses in central Wallingford.

About 33% of companies responded to the questionnaire, with the majority expressing an interest in a recyclable waste route alongside their non-recyclable wastes. Phase 2 of the project – which was still taking place as this newsletter went to press – has therefore been to follow through with interested companies, helping them identify their requirements prior to being formally signed up by Grundon to a trial recycling scheme. To date, 20 businesses have taken this step.

Kevin Harrison of Sustainable Wallingford, who was closely involved in Phase 1 of the scheme said: 'Involving Sustainable Wallingford in this project has given us the opportunity to understand the problems of local SME's and help promote a positive message about the 3 Rs, "reduce, re-use and recycle".'

Rachel Viney, with input from Moira Dorey and Kevin Harrison

Community coppicing

Community coppicing is a 'condensed form of forestry' which allows small areas of land to be used productively to create a sustainable source of timber. Hazel rods can be grown on a site as small as an allotment plot (there is a site at All Saints School in Didcot).

A coppice takes two years to establish and 10-15 years to mature.

The Oxford Woodland Project, a partnership between local authorities and a charity (see www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/woodland_project) provides advice to communities wanting to set up their own coppice. David Rees from the project spoke at an open meeting on 27th March organised by Sustainable Wallingford. At least one of those who attended is now planning to set up a community coppice.



Talking point

Reducing car use: pipe dream or possibility?

Cars – and their cost to the environment – have been making headlines recently. Whether it's recent Budget incentives to encourage ownership of smaller vehicles or the announcement of the first road lanes exclusive to car sharers, the message seems to be that we need to think twice about our dependence on this form of personal transport.

But even the most environmentally conscious among us might think twice about managing without a car at all. For families, in particular, the idea might seem totally impractical, given the amount of ferrying about involved in the social lives of most children.

Step forward Sustainable Wallingford member John Griffin, his wife Amanda and their three children, Tom, Matthew and Peter. The family hasn't owned a car for over ten years.

It wasn't always that way: when John and Amanda came here, each was the proud owner of a Triumph Herald. The family car that eventually replaced them

never quite fitted the bill. The size of car Amanda needed for work journeys on her own wasn't big enough for family trips with camping equipment, for example. And in any case, for long journeys Amanda preferred to take the train so she could do some work. And John, who works locally, and is a keen cyclist, didn't really need to drive much at all.

So when their trusty-but-neglected Cavalier ('I think it was cleaned once for a wedding,' says Amanda) finally gave up the ghost, the Griffins spent several weeks wondering about the ideal replacement, and came to the conclusion they didn't really need one.

These days, on the rare occasions they need a car for a family holiday, they hire one. That way they get exactly the type of car they want, and don't have any maintenance worries or garage bills to contend with either. But most of the time family members travel by public transport or bike or walk.

Only when Amanda's work as a local Traidcraft representative involves transporting large quantities of Fair Trade goods does the lack of a car prove a problem. The solution? Amanda has an arrangement with several friends to drive their cars if they're not using them. And neighbours do offer lifts sometimes.

Car-free living it isn't. But the Griffins show that it's possible for a family with two working parents and three teenagers to manage perfectly well without *owning* a vehicle. For them, the disadvantages are outweighed by the advantages: no vehicle depreciation; less local noise and pollution; plenty of exercise; children who can confidently make their own way home from just about anywhere – and an encyclopaedic knowledge of local bus timetables.

Have *you* been able to reduce your car use – or share one – or do without a car altogether? We'd like to hear from you. Email the Editor on penny.kiley@virgin.net.

One bin day

Here's an idea worth copying... The Environment Agency's Science Group, based at Evenlode House in Wallingford, decided to participate in One Bin Day, an environmental initiative aimed at reducing the amount of office waste sent to landfill.

Sustainable Wallingford member Sarah Webb is Office Manager at Evenlode House, Wallingford, and reports: 'Currently the contents of the desk bins are sent to landfill. Although we have plenty of recycling bins, staff were generally putting lots of recyclable waste into their desk bins as these were closer and therefore more convenient.

'In an effort to encourage staff to think before they threw anything away, all desk bins were taken away for one day. All recycling bins remained in their original positions and were re-labelled so it was clear what materials could be put in them, and one landfill bin per floor was available. In one day we achieved a 50% reduction in the amount of waste sent to landfill. And after consultation with staff, we decided to return only one bin per office, to help staff change their habits longer term.'



Local news

There is an alternative

Just Trading, the new fair trade/organic shop in High Street, had its official launch in March, with help from Midsomer Murders actress Jane Wymark. Tea, coffee, herb teas, juice were served all day, with samples of some delicious snacks, cakes and biscuits made from the shop's ingredients.

Meanwhile, Down to Earth, which opened on St Martin's Street last year, is expanding. They have widened their range of food to include chilled goods such as cheese and meat – most produced in the local area.

Freecycle

Wallingford now has its own Freecycle group – part of the movement which allows people to offer unwanted items to other members for free. It works on the same basis as our SwapShops, except that it is all done by email. Membership of the group has just passed the 200 mark, and is growing fast.

See www.freecycle.org for general details or www://groups.yahoo.com/group/Wallingford-UK-Freecycle for details of the local group.

Transport improvements

Thames Travel bus services were further improved at the end of January: now there is a weekday X39 to Oxford every half-hour, with late-night buses on Fridays and Saturdays until 02.20, Oxford buses every hour on Sundays, and late evening buses on the X40 Reading service, as well as some new bus stop signs and raised kerbs. The X39 has also had a route change and goes via Crowmarsh and Benson; about half the buses continue from central Oxford to Watlington.

Transport setback

Sustainable transport received a setback with the dropping of the Cholsey–Wallingford cycle route (along with four others) from the County's Five-year Local Transport Plan. A lot of effort had gone into this route that would have encouraged more people to cycle to work. The new transport plan seems to have a different emphasis from the first one: cycling and walking are not considered important unless they also deliver improvements in air quality or congestion.

Garden waste

South Oxfordshire District Council is planning to replace its eco-sacks (a pilot scheme which began last year) with wheelie bins for garden waste. These will cost £29 a year and will be emptied fortnightly. If the new scheme goes ahead, gardeners will no longer be able to use eco-sacks or use the green vehicles at community waste sites (they will have to use the recycling centres at Oakley Wood, Redbridge and Drayton). The Council has told Sustainable Wallingford members that it has no statutory duty to collect garden waste and that the wheelie bins system is expected to increase the amount of waste collected and save money. Under current plans, the last collection of ecosacks will be on 2nd June.

For your diary

APRIL

Tuesday 18th: Climate Change group, 13 Castle Street, 7.30pm.

Saturday 29th: Wallingford Farmers' Market.

JUNE

Saturday 10th: SwapShop in the Regal Centre, 10am-12 noon.

We aim to produce this newsletter three times a year to keep members and supporters in touch with what's going on.

Don't forget that in between newsletters you can keep up to date via our website www.sustainablewallingford.org.

Who's Who

Sustainable Wallingford is a group of volunteers who share a passion for making a difference locally. Membership of Sustainable Wallingford is free. You can commit as much or as little time as you are able to. You can help us to promote sustainability in Wallingford by receiving our newsletter, helping us organise events or working with a specific action group on initiatives that motivate you.

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If you have any items for inclusion in the next newsletter, please contact Penny Kiley.

