



working locally to make a difference

New 'Buy Local' Directory

We have just produced the second edition of our 'Buy Local' directory, following a successful first edition two years ago.

The first directory had 50 entries; the new one has 67, which is a healthy sign for the local economy. The second edition includes a new section on 'sustainable living' which features outlets for fair trade, recycled and reclaimed goods, plus tips on growing your own food – the best and cheapest way of eating local produce.

We launched the new directory on Saturday 28 April with a stall in Wallingford Market Place, with help from the Mayor of Wallingford, Nigel Moor. Throughout the morning, we handed out copies of the directory, chatted to passers-by, and gave out free samples of local food and drink, courtesy of Church Lane Foods and Brightwell Vineyard. The event made the front page of the Wallingford Herald.

We have already had some great feedback from members of the public, one family telling us: 'We found the previous edition useful, but this version has been noticeably "fattened" with many more local producers and suppliers... the booklet should help us buy even more produce locally.'

We will be distributing the directory to every household in Wallingford and in many of the surrounding villages. Copies will also be available from the Town Information Office, and in local shops, libraries and other outlets.

We would like to thank South Oxfordshire District Council, the Ecology

Building Society, Wallingford Town Council, Wallingford Rotary Club and the Countryside Agency for financial support in producing the new directory.

Pledging to tackle climate change

The new Climate Change Group held its first public event during the Farmers' Market on 31 March – a market stall to offer advice and information on saving energy and reducing household carbon emissions.

We encouraged people to make pledges to cut their carbon footprint and gathered some interesting pledges. Next time round we hope to offer some more challenging pledges which are more of a lifestyle change, such as lift-sharing to work occasionally, or taking the Eurostar train on holiday rather than flying.

Packaging unwrapped

On 25 January the Community Action Group (CAG) project ran an event called 'Packaging unwrapped' to inform members about the problem of excessive packaging and what it might be possible to do about it; Mark Palmer, Shona Powrie and Caron Spence represented Sustainable Wallingford.

Jane Finnerty and Ann Sharman of the Women's Institute began by saying that as well as generating unnecessary waste, overpackaging costs the consumer money – 16% of consumer food expenditure is for the cost of packaging (£470 per year for the average household). They then described the WI's campaign on the issue in 2006. There was a national campaign of returning excess packaging to supermarkets, with some success.

Martin Pearse of Resource Futures described the Courtauld Agreement of 2005, between WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), the Environment Minister and 13 big retailers, who agreed to design out the growth in packaging waste, and then reduce it, over the next few years. They also agreed to look at ways of reducing food waste.

Moira Dorey of the CAG project described the current Packaging Regulations, which state that the amount of packaging used must be the minimum needed for safety, quality, etc, must be non-noxious and must be reusable. By November 2006 there had been four successful prosecutions for contraventions of the regulations.

Terri Bonham, Trading Standards Officer for Oxfordshire, described the role of TSOs. Packaging and waste have not traditionally been a major area of activity for them, and there are legal and practical difficulties with bringing prosecutions, but she urged people to make complaints to them when appropriate. Adverse publicity, and working with companies to address the problem at source, are preferable to prosecutions.

There then followed a group discussion session which generated a list of ideas for possible actions, such as running a WI-style campaign, lobbying supermarket companies' environmental officers, or having a media campaign to highlight good and bad examples of packaging.

The first outcome has been a study, by Hannah Moser of the CAG Project and Daniel Dempsey of the County Council, of the packaging of Easter eggs; they found that the percentage of total weight accounted for by packaging ranged from 16% up to nearly 50%. For more details, see http://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/download/egg_report.pdf.

CAGs and WI groups plan to hold a joint action day on 30 June to raise awareness of packaging issues, with non-confrontational events at local supermarkets. At the time of writing, we have yet to decide exactly what to do on that date (it coincides with our next Swap Shop) – please look out for publicity nearer the time, and let us know if you'd like to help.

More on packaging can be found at <http://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/packagingunwrapped.htm>.

New transport group

For a few years I have represented Sustainable Wallingford on the Town Council integrated transport working group (ITSWP). It involves town councillors, school governors, Thames Travel, police, the county councillor, local transport reps and others in discussing ideas to improve the town environment and make travel in and around the town safer and more sustainable for all.

We as a group have achieved some more cycle racks outside the Town Council offices and outside Jumpers, but we have not managed to persuade Waitrose to add more racks so far. We are disappointed that the Cholsey–Wallingford cycle path was dropped from the county's travel plan, but are hoping that funding from developments can help to get it to happen. New pedestrian crossings have helped children to walk safely to school at St John's and all schools have been writing their travel plans to help shift from cars to foot cycle or public transport.

Thanks to our efforts, Oxfordshire County Council has started planning for a 20 mph zone for the town centre, which is due to be implemented in 2007/08. A preliminary survey in April will be followed by more detailed surveys and consultation. OCC is also planning to restrict parking on St George's Road around the junction with Millington Way, where there have been some 'near

misses' when cars have not seen cyclists approaching.

The group helped to ensure that the developer of the Blue Mountains site on Wantage Road will fund a pedestrian crossing near the Fir Tree School, and contribute money towards the Cholsey–Wallingford cycle path. We need to lobby SODC to make sure the Fairmile development adds a significant contribution to the Cholsey–Wallingford cycle path.

The Town Council will review the make-up of its committees and working parties after the May elections, and it is likely that the ITSWP will be replaced by a Traffic Advisory Group, consisting of Town Councillors and representatives of the police and the County Council.

However, some of us have joined a Wallingford Air Quality Steering Group, led by the District Council, which is discussing how to spend OCC money to reduce air pollution in the High Street. More sustainable travel options for local people (bus, cycle, pedestrian and shared vehicles) is a clear way of reducing the fumes, and has other benefits of improving health, cutting carbon emissions and lowering congestion.

Several members of the former Town Council group would like to form a Sustainable Wallingford Transport Action Group, so if you are interested or have ideas I would be glad to hear from you.

John Griffin

Sustainability in schools

To start the year, the Schools Group gathered used Christmas cards from the local primary schools – many thanks to all who 'posted' their used cards in the boxes provided! The cards will be reused in activities with children throughout the year.

As well as running practical sessions at school events, the Schools Group has

been working with local primary school teachers to help make 'sustainability' a key part of teaching and learning. Some of our members have been writing a series of assemblies which teachers can use to raise awareness of where our food comes from, what we do with our waste and the impact of climate change. These assemblies are being produced in collaboration with RISC, our local Development Education Centre in Reading. Once they have been trialled in local primary schools this term, they will be available from the RISC website. (www.risc.org.uk/education)

The Schools Group welcomes new members - you don't need to be a teacher or have experience of running activities with children, there are plenty of other ways to join in the work we do. If you'd like to find out more contact Louise Robinson on 01491 835420.

Fir Tree news

The garden at Fir Tree School goes from strength to strength. Wallingford Round Table has agreed to donate £1,000 per year for three years to the project. The garden has also won national recognition: it is featured in an article in the May issue of the BBC Good Food Guide magazine in an article about school vegetable gardens.

See 'Help wanted' on page 5 for details of how you can get involved.

Feedback

We try to keep local councillors up to date with our work, and after sending out a copy of our last newsletter we were delighted to receive a letter of thanks from Councillor Roger Belson, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development at Oxfordshire County Council. He said: 'Many congratulations on all that you have achieved so far as you are an example to other market towns.'

Solar panels – a personal experience

Many people are now considering fitting solar panels, but not sure what it involves. Sustainable Wallingford member Chris Cussens shares his experience.

Although it had been at the back of our minds for some time, it was a newspaper article that finally persuaded us to install solar photo voltaic (PV) Panels. 'What was once a rich eccentrics' foible now makes economic sense' it said. Moreover a PV installation, in addition to our six-year-old hot water installation, would help us to put our money where our mouth is.

Preparation

We needed to get (1) quotes from suppliers (2) planning permission from the local council (South Oxfordshire District Council - SODC), (3) a grant from the Energy Saving Trust (EST) and (4) a contract with an electricity company to buy back what we generate.

The EST web site provides a list of accredited installers, so we were able to request quotes and select a supplier (the total cost would be £18,000 plus VAT). Our supplier advised us that we needed to contact our local authority for the installation. Certain types of installation do not require planning permission and we just squeezed in.

The EST awards grants of up to 50% of the total installation cost, provided the property has full loft installation, cavity wall insulation, low energy light bulbs, a central heating programmer, a room thermostat and thermostatic radiator valves. At this time (November 2006) grant money was readily available; however since the beginning of 2007 demand for grants has easily outstripped the money available. Our supplier recommended Good Energy for electricity supply, which is what we switched to. They buy back PV-

generated electricity and also supply 100% green electricity themselves.

Installation

Essentially the system consists of 16 panels on the roof, an inverter in the loft which converts the generated DC current to AC, connection to the national grid so that we can export what we don't use and a meter downstairs so that we can keep an eye on what is generated. Once the two-day installation was completed and connected, there was great excitement when our first output was metered.

Living with solar PV

The only action you *have* to take is to read the PV meter every three months and send the readings back to Good Energy. However, if you want to make the most of the buy-back scheme, you should use as much of the PV-generated electricity as you can. The electricity we use from the grid costs us 11.75p per unit, whereas we sell back to the grid at 4.5p per unit. However, Good Energy pay us for all the electricity we generate, whether we use it or not. So our new household motto is 'Use electricity while the sun shines!'

Is it worth it?

We believe the answer has to be a resounding YES.

On environmental grounds, the forecast CO₂ total emissions saving of 1,257 kg/year - around one-eighth of the total annual emissions from the average Briton – which will help support the fight against global warming.

On purely personal financial grounds, the day-to-day savings look modest (maybe £1 per day, though we won't really know until the first year is up). On current electricity prices, this would give something like a 27-year payback time, but as electricity prices rise, the payback time could significantly reduce. Moreover, investment in PV panels has

been estimated to add nearly 9% to a property's value.

Finally, we hope that our experience will demonstrate to other people how it can be done and encourage them to install a system of their own.

Chris Cussens

A more detailed version of this article can be found on the Sustainable Wallingford website.

Local news

Climate change survey

ClimateXchange, a networking group led by the Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University, is conducting a survey on attitudes to climate change in Oxfordshire. You can take part online at <http://survey.climatex.org/index.php?sid=66717>.

Project Timescape

Project Timescape, Northmoor Trust's new education visitor centre is now open. It's at Hill Farm, at the base of the Wittenham Clumps and is open to the public on Sundays (and Tuesday–Saturday during school holidays). More details at www.northmoortrust.co.uk.

Battery collection

The number of batteries collected for recycling in the collection box at Just Trading since October last year now totals over 500.

Freecycle

Wallingford Freecycle now has 1500 members – that's a lot of unwanted items passed on and kept out of landfill. See <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Wallingford-UK-Freecycle/>

Working with others

We are pleased to see the growing interest in sustainability issues both

nationally and at grass roots level locally, and are building our networks with like-minded organisations.

- In January members of Sustainable Wallingford attended a debate on 'How can we tackle climate change?' organised by Wantage-based group the Little Green People.
- In February we attended a Sustainable Energy event at Little Wittenham organised by Oxfordshire's Rural Forum.
- In May we had a stall at the May Day event at Braziers Park.

We have recently heard about new groups being set up in the area: Low Carbon Wolvercote was launched in April, there is another new group just getting going in Burcot and Clifton Hampden with plans for action on carbon-cutting, local transport and waste – and Abingdon has a network of people who are committed to cutting their carbon emissions and meet regularly to share ideas and advice.

Please check our website for links to other local groups working on sustainability.



Help wanted

We are always looking for more volunteers to take part in our activities. If you would like to join a particular group, please contact them on the details below. If you would like to help out on a more informal basis, we currently need help with the following activities:

Garden work party

The Vegetable Garden at Fir Tree School will be holding two work parties this year: 9 June and 22 September. Both will run from 10am–4pm, with a 'bring and share' lunch at 12.30.

Come for as much time as you like. Bring your own fork and spade. Children especially welcome. Drop by just for a look and a cuppa (available all day) if you don't have much time or just want to visit to see this innovative project, now in its second year. All are welcome, including members of the school community, Sustainable Wallingford members and supporters, friends of the project, and the curious.

In June we will be weeding, harvesting, cleaning the outside of the polytunnel and tidying (and probably watering).

Also, we are always looking for volunteers who can spare part of their Friday, either every week, or when they can, to help with the many and never-diminishing tasks which pile up, even in a small garden like ours. If you are interested, contact Sam Settle on 01491 838 054.

Bunkfest

We are hoping to help with recycling again at this year's Bunkfest, but we need volunteers. Please contact the Waste Group (see 'Contacts') if you can give some time to this valuable work. This year's festival is on 31 August–2 September (see www.bunkfest.co.uk).

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.

Contacts:

Waste: Mark Palmer 01491 839 230
Local Sourcing: Dorothy Cussens 01865 891 197

Schools: Louise Robinson 01491 835 420

Transport: John Griffin 01491 838523

Climate Change: vacant

Communications group/Media

contact: Rachel Viney, 07980 803969



Dates for your diary

JUNE

Saturday 9th

Work party, Fir Tree School, 10am–4pm

Saturday 30th

Swap Shop, Regal Centre, 10am–12 noon

WI 'Packaging unwrapped' action day

JULY

Sat-Sun 14th–15th

Children's food festival, Northmoor Trust

AUGUST

Friday 31st

Bunkfest

SEPTEMBER

Saturday 1st–Sunday 2nd

Bunkfest

Saturday 22nd

Work party, Fir Tree School, 10am–4pm

From the editor

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 at www.sustainablewallingford.org. We will post details of meetings and other events so please do check for updates.

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