

OLD MARSTON PARISH COUNCIL

CLIMATE EMERGENCY WORKSHOP



The Climate Emergency Workshop was organised by the Parish Council's [Environment Committee](#), and supports the Parish Council's [Environment Policy](#). The workshop was chaired by Alistair Morris, and this report was prepared by Charlotte Vinnicombe, both of whom are Parish Councillors and members of the Parish Council Environment Committee (pictured left).

This workshop was a starting point for community groups, activities and events that will inform, inspire and encourage residents to make their homes and lifestyles more sustainable. The Environment Committee is already planning our next event.

Introduction

On 24th January 2022, Old Marston Parish Council hosted a Climate Emergency workshop. This was an open meeting for residents to discuss and decide how, and what, we, as a local community can do to tackle the climate emergency; and to learn what resources are out there for us to draw on.

The workshop was advertised through posters, on the Parish Council website, and through social media, and was organised in line with COVID guidelines. The event, held in Mortimer Hall, was well-attended, with 30 participants (which included some members of the Parish Council). We had originally hoped to hold the event to coincide with COP-26, but it was felt that the pandemic made an in-person event too difficult at that time. We hope this workshop is just the start of a range of information sources, community activities and real action to help reduce Marston's carbon footprint.

The evening was divided into two sections: first, we heard from two guest speakers, and then we invited questions, ideas and suggestions from residents to prompt a discussion about where to go next. We sought to keep the discussion specifically to what positive action we can take locally, as a community, on a realistic scale, at a realistic cost, in our community or in our own homes and gardens.

This report is intended to capture the useful information and great ideas that came out of the workshop, to serve as a point of reference for those seeking further information, and to promote some of the community projects, large or small, that will be taken further by residents.

We are grateful to everyone who helped organise the event, the speakers, and the residents who came along to make this a special and successful event. In particular, thank you to the other Parish Councillors who helped set up this meeting, especially Skye Denno, for creating the poster and setting up the booking system, and Peter Williams and Mary James. Thanks also to the Mortimer Hall Management Committee for the use of the building, and to Tim Cann, the Parish Clerk for opening up and locking down the building on the day and setting up the AV.

Part 1 - Our Speakers

Our two invited speakers were:

[Alison Grunewald](#) from [Low Carbon Hub](#). Alison leads the Energy Solutions Oxfordshire team and is Business Relationships Manager at the Low Carbon Hub.

[Harry Bratt](#) from [Cosy Homes Oxfordshire](#) is the Marketing and Communications Coordinator (Low Carbon Hub) to talk about the Cosy Homes service, which advises on domestic energy efficiency.

We also had the benefit of advice from Tom Garrood, Sustainable City Engagement Officer for Oxford City Council - Tgarrood@oxford.gov.uk.

The presentations

1. Low Carbon Hub (Alison Grunewald) – non-residential buildings

The Low Carbon Hub is a local, social enterprise, providing support to community groups for projects such as adding solar panels on roofs on community/public buildings, and other energy efficiency measures in non-residential buildings. They support community-owned or community-controlled projects, and the involvement of local people is an integral part of what they do.

Any individual can ask a question of the Helpdesk, or ask for support through the Community Engagement Officer, Cathy Ryan. Low Carbon Hub can administer grants to businesses and community groups. Their Community Grant Fund offers financial support for community energy activities across the county – small grants of £500 and larger grants of up to £5,000 are available for community members of the Low Carbon Hub CIC (Community Interest Company) to support projects that will lead to a reduction in carbon emissions.

Old Marston Parish Council is not itself eligible to join as a low carbon community group, but any other local groups seeking to cut Oxford's carbon footprint could apply at a cost of £1 to join (and doing so would enable that group to access help from the Community Engagement Officer).

How could Low Carbon Hub help in Marston?

In an area like Marston, Low Carbon Hub would principally be looking to help with the installation of solar panels. The ideal building would have a roof about tennis court size, be in good condition, with no asbestos, and generate significant daytime energy consumption. Under Low Carbon Hub's model, they would own and manage the panels, lease the roof space from the host organisation, and would raise the capital to pay for the kit and installation. Then once installed, the host organisation would buy the electricity generated by the panels, at the same or less than they are currently paying.

Energy efficiency – 'Energy Solutions Oxfordshire'

Low Carbon Hub have also thought about the barriers to energy efficiency, and how to remove them. In response, they have created 'Energy Solutions Oxfordshire'. This is socially-motivated, and seeks to create efficiencies of time, money and energy. They are building a list of trusted suppliers and contractors by seeking feedback from local people, which is used to gather list of reliable local installers. This might also be a good resource for groups of residents looking to club together to get a commercial supplier to upgrade a number of similar houses as a single project.

Community Renewal Fund

This is a scheme that runs out in June 2022! Working with the County Council, Low Carbon Hub can offer fully-funded 1:1 support on any premises to look at carbon reduction solutions (feasibility studies, investment support and installation management). They could look at Mortimer Hall, and help us consider options such as solar panels, electric vehicle charging, heating, lighting, etc. They would help us to look at what's possible, advise us on what particular technologies could be installed, and help with tender and specification. They also have access to loan finances, and can help check the work at the end of the installation.

The Low Carbon Hub presentation slides will be made available elsewhere on the Parish Council website.

2. Cosy Homes Oxfordshire (Harry Bratt) – retrofitting homes

If everyone in the world lived like we live in the UK, we would need THREE planets to sustain us – and housing accounts for just over 20% of our use of resources. So if we tackle housing, that would make a really good contribution to our sustainability.

Cosy Homes Oxfordshire is a commercial enterprise that seeks to inspire us to make our own homes more environmentally sustainable. It began with BEIS government funding (Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy), and has been continuing more recently without that funding. They recognise what a major challenge it is to tackle environmental sustainability in our own homes, as there are so many different improvements we could make. Cosy Homes Oxfordshire help us to face that challenge.

Harry talked to us about EPC ratings for homes. An '[Energy Performance Certificate](#)' is needed whenever a property is built, sold or rented. If a home is rated 'A', this means it is more or less net zero. But only about 10,000 houses in the UK have this rating. If we wanted to improve all 29 million homes in the UK by to an A rating 2050, we would need to upgrade 1.8 homes per minute. And it's not an option to knock them all down – that would actually increase the carbon cost.

Cosy Homes can help with a range of improvements, not all of which are obvious energy efficiency improvements – e.g. can also tackle damp, etc. Changes like this can improve people's living circumstances, which can help to get people more engaged with addressing climate change.

Getting an EPC can be a short-cut way to assessing the efficiency of your own home, but Cosy Homes take a different approach. They will assess the whole house, and provide a 'whole house plan'. They look at behaviour (thermostats, remote controls, etc), insulation, whether the house is air-tight, boiler efficiency, and so on – because all of these measures work together. and does make recommendations on what you can do to improve your energy use, and shows you the benefit of each one).

An EPC does also give you recommendations on what you can do to improve your energy use, and shows you the benefit of each one.

Cosy Homes also understand that we probably want to improve bit by bit, not least because that's probably the only way we can afford to do this. Whatever actions the 'house plan' suggests, they will help to plan these works stage by stage, to help people do the work in the right order, so the project becomes more affordable, and so the homeowner knows what to prioritise.

They do charge fees for this service. They recognise there is no easy way to face the challenge, and through this business they are trying to prove the concept; and people are taking it up. That said, Cosy Homes offers all residents a free 'plan builder'. If you provide your postcode, and a few details, such as your budget and the areas of your home you are most interested in improving – you can create a plan, with an estimate of the cost and the carbon saving. If you then want to take up the service, you can do so. Harry showed us a number of case studies, showing how savings on heating costs can recover cost of work in about 6 years, as well as savings on carbon emissions.

One of the biggest savings of all is insulation – because it's better to simply use less energy!

The Cosy Homes presentation slides will be made available elsewhere on the Parish Council website.

3. City Council initiatives

The City Council will run events in the summer

- e.g. an open homes day – so people can see for themselves what a retrofit looks like and talk to the owner/occupiers to get information about their experience of retrofitting.
- e.g. a trade fair in the Town Hall on 25 / 26 June, involving local contractors. Cosy Homes and similar groups will also be invited to give advice.

Communities can get involved in the run-up to the open homes event, to help people who are willing to open up their homes.

Heritage constraints

We talked briefly about the 'Smart and Fair Neighbourhood scheme' in Rose Hill and Osney Island. Osney Island is a conservation area, and we understand they are looking at how they can install solar panels locally, looking at what technologies can be used, and navigating the issues of a conservation area – they are finding that a lot of the heritage constraints come from government, and these can make eco-improvements more difficult. There are lots of things that can be done to improve buildings even if they're listed, but it might require an expert in the field to assess first.

Ecology

We are encouraged to look at our impact on ecology in Marston. The City Council has recently recruited a full time Ecology and Biodiversity Officer, Tristan Carlyle, who could support us with this.

The City Council has also published an [Urban Forestry Strategy](#) to explain how it aims to protect, manage and enhance the trees and hedgerows in the city. Improving biodiversity is key as part of the Council's work to achieve a [Zero Carbon Oxford](#) by 2040 through the work of the [Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership](#).

There is lots of support available from Oxford City – they fund the planting of trees, forests, orchards, wild flower meadows, etc.

Part 2 - discussion/questions

Q: Lots of homes in Marston are very similar – could a number of people club together, to get a discount?

A: In a situation like this, Cosy Homes could provide a whole house plan bespoke to one home that everyone else could draw on. We could connect with residents at Rose Hill, who did just this. Instead of a whole house plan, a group could get together to focus on one type of improvement.

The City Council have been working on producing a template for a retrofit, and want to scale up to do a neighbourhood at a time. We need ways to take one project/case study, and develop that into a programme of retrofit for a whole area. The Parish Council would like to help with that sort of approach too. There are particular challenges for older people living alone, struggling to heat their homes. This approach could help them too.

Low Carbon Hub can also help to get information about contractors who will do this work. Alison commented that residential and commercial suppliers tend not to cross over, and it's particularly difficult at the moment because supply chains are currently a problem. But Low Carbon Hub would like people to train to do this sort of project – Alison mentioned a 'Retrofit Academy'. Low Carbon Hub can help to raise capital to help people too. [Info@lowcarbonhub.org](mailto:info@lowcarbonhub.org)

Q: How can we organise these community groups?

A: use WhatsApp groups to create more networks to collect up information from people and share it with each other. We would like to have a larger meeting later in the year, possibly outdoors, and share more information, and find traders and suppliers to attend and offer advice too.

Q: What sort of home insulation should we use?

A: there are many different types of insulation, and the market is constantly changing, improving, becoming more sustainable (e.g. wood fibre insulation). Wool is good but it can't be retrofitted. Insulation can affect breathability of the house – so unless it's also got ventilation and good circulation of air it can make it damp. If so, it's important to stop the source of damp at the same time – and the damp is usually coming from the ground.

Q: What's the best way to make Marston, and Oxfordshire, more sustainable?

A: the best thing we can do is install solar panels. The river has already been investigated for water power, and is not ideal in this area.

Q: Can schools/community centres install solar panels?

A: the Swan and St Nick's don't have panels, but discussions are already under way to assess St Nick's. The Swan hopes to get community-funded hub panels, but they don't yet have energy data (not been able to operate at full capacity). Solar panels will be raised for discussion at the next Parish Council meeting, for Mortimer Hall. They can be added to a flat roof; a frame is built for them.

The fact that Old Marston is a conservation area is sometimes a problem – residents are told they can't have panels facing the street, or have difficulty getting planning permission. But in fact the Old Marston housing stock is very mixed in terms of heritage, so it should be possible, and the Parish

Council should make a representation to the City Planners about the difficulties some residents have in getting solar panels installed.

Q: Could street lights be switched to LED?

A: this is a County council matter, and a representative should take it up with them.

Q: What schemes are currently available to finance boiler upgrades or other retrofitting?

A: The 'Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme (DRHI) will close to new applicants on 31 March 2022. It will be replaced by the [Boiler Upgrade Scheme](#) – which is coming in March. This will provide some money up front for air/ground source heat pumps. There are some recommendations on the Cosy Homes website now. Newer rounds of funding will be focussed on owner-occupiers. Ox City and County councils have chunks of that funding.

The County Council has new funding from the Sustainable Warmth Competition, which is investing £430 million across 57 projects and will help local authorities to upgrade energy inefficient homes of low-income households in England. The projects will start in early 2022 and complete by March 2023. The scheme will enable you to apply for up to £5k, to cover cost of two thirds of your work. The scheme, currently called 'Local Authority Delivery Phase 3 (LAD3)' – might be renamed the 'Green Homes scheme'. Oxford City Council is part of this consortium. Details not yet available.

Q: What are the Low Carbon groups in Oxford?

A: [Low Carbon Oxford North](#), and [Low Carbon East Oxford](#). Do we need a Low Carbon Marston?!

Ideas for community projects

- *Street trees* – street trees obviously cost money to install and maintain – but volunteers are invited to become tree champions (training provided) to monitor our trees
- *Painting houses white* – volunteer invited to investigate solar paint and planning constraints
- *Collective roof/wall insulation group* – more volunteers invited to share information and look up suppliers, and to work with Tom
- *Car pool and community shared electric car club*
- *Shared car scheme* – one is coming to a local area in New Marston (comprising just a few streets, to keep it very local)
- *Community shop* – a new idea that is gaining momentum – to stock local produce, staffed by volunteers.
- *Edible planters for street veg/herbs*
- *Adapting to the potentially increasing flood risk.* Maintaining flood plains, and demanding better drainage management (to help stop sewage leaks).
- *Water capture scheme* – run by Thames Water, for farmers, to keep ditches clear, prevent run-off. Research needed.

- *Croft Road cycle path* - pitch black at night – must be improved, to promote active travel at night as well as in the day.

Other ways to get involved

And lastly, just a reminder that Marston residents are warmly invited to get in touch with the [Marston Community Garden Group](#) and, connected to that, the [Marston Eco Group](#). These are well-established, friendly local groups that offer an amazing range of activities, including small gardening plots, the Eco Refill Station, the Wombles litter-picking group, and lots more. They are independent of the Parish Council, but are supported by both the Parish and City Council.