



Paper 19

Chew Magna's Go Zero project – a case study of Community Action

Go Zero - Saving the planet through local action

For an environment improvement programme to have any chance of success there has to be a challenge, there has to be ownership and there has to be patience. There also need to be well-defined values, aims and guiding principles. This much is clear from a study of the ambitious Go-Zero project that the Somerset village of Chew Magna brought into being in 2004. It also shows that such a programme can benefit poorer people in other parts of the world.

Overview and local church involvement

Based in Chew Magna, a village of some 1100 people, Go Zero is a community project that aims to raise within the parish an awareness of the environmental and social impact of everyday actions and to provide suggestions for change towards a zero waste society.

The Go Zero project seeks to interpret waste and zero waste not just in a physical sense or in terms of renewable energy but to cover the whole spectrum of wastefulness in society right through to the way people lives their lives and live out their spiritual values. There is an underlying realisation by those who are steering it that waste causes other people to suffer.

It seeks to offer affordable and sustainable solutions that reduce energy and conserve resources; to contract the carbon footprints of individual villagers and households; and to brighten the lives of the community. At the same time it recognises a responsibility to encourage others throughout the world to do likewise.

Although not initiated or driven by them, all three churches in the village - Anglican, Catholic and Baptist - play an active part in the programme. 'I believe the church is at the spiritual heart of the community,' says Revd Charles Roberts, vicar of St Andrew's parish church. 'It is important that the community sees us supporting Go Zero.'

One member of St Andrew's congregation who is very much involved with Go Zero as a member of its steering group is Ian Roderick. He explains that everything is done within the confines of a set of principles that define

the vision. He emphasises that Go Zero is unique to Chew Magna but it can be imitated.

An example of what can be done to help communities elsewhere is the carbon offset fund that involves the local travel agent. Ian Roderick says the aim is to get people in the parish to think about their carbon load so that when they fly they donate money into an offset fund.

'This can be used to reduce carbon emission somewhere in the world. We hope to erect wind turbines in Southern India. But it could be tree planting or whatever people decide they want to do with it.'

A tree-farming scheme that could benefit has already been identified and funded in Southern India. This will create income and employment, produce fruit and timber for the local economy and soak up carbon from the air.

One of the outcomes of the Go Zero project has been the creation of a new initiative named The Converging World (TCW). Still in its infancy, this is a UK charity that will operate globally to 'connect communities through action to maximize our quality of life while achieving equal and minimal impact on the Earth's resources.' It applies the principles of contraction and convergence in which the ecological impact of human activity is both reduced and equalised globally.

Values and aims.

The Go Zero project has the following values and aims at the heart of its vision:

- To regard the planet as something we should care for and cherish.
- To live sustainably so as not to deplete the planet's finite resources.
- To modify our behaviour so that we can live in harmony with nature and demonstrate our commitment to equity for all residents of our planet.
- To help influence the behaviour and attitudes of others in working towards sustainable communities.
- To be always looking for new ways to minimise the use of resources and to strive for a community where waste doesn't exist.

- To set up systems within the community that enable its members and others to reach these objectives.

Guiding principles

The Go Zero project has the following principles at the heart of the organisation:

Inclusiveness – to involve all who wish to take part

Transparency – open and complete communication

Clarity - for decision making and acceptance of responsibility

Effectiveness - to communicate the aims of the project

Respect for others - no destructive criticism; to lead only by example

Measure, monitor and report on progress and achievements

Organise individual lives according to this vision

To help others, anywhere in the world, to move towards a fulfilling life style with zero waste, equity and justice.

Background

The inspiration for Chew Magna Zero Waste was the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Coffee House Challenge which was launched on 22nd March 2004 to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Society.

The Challenge consisted of a series of debates and discussions in over eighty venues across the UK. The Bristol region held two events on the day followed up with a series of further meetings both in Bristol and in Chew Magna.

Participating groups used the five challenges of RSA's Manifesto for the 21st century to steer the discussions:

- Encouraging Enterprise
- Moving Towards a Zero Waste Society
- Fostering Resilient Communities
- Developing a Capable Population
- Advancing Global Citizenship

It was the challenge to create a zero waste society that fired the imagination of the Chew Magna team. It happened to coincide with the village embarking on a parish plan exercise. Also a grant from the Bath and North East Somerset Council (BaNeS) enabled a survey

to be carried out to determine how residents would like to see their parish develop.

The Go Zero project was born out of this coincidence. Over 60 parishioner were involved in the preliminary meetings, resulting in the formation of a number of focus groups to look at what were considered the most important issues.

Focus Groups

Four areas of action were identified and these were structured in the form of four focus groups. The purpose of these on-going groups has been to explore the issues around each of their subjects and, more importantly, to stimulate action.

These groups were and still are:

- Waste and recycling
- People and consumption
- Transport and energy
- The converging world.

A fifth group, Junior Zero, has since been started with the purpose of encouraging children to be actively involved in the programme.

1) Waste and recycling group

Here Chew Magna is fortunate in being within the boundary of the Bath and North East Somerset [BANES], a local authority that is seen as one that is leading the way in recycling. From the beginning it has cooperated with the Go Zero in its waste and recycling efforts. In BANES each household creates over a tonne of waste a year which costs in the region of £100 to dispose of, either to be recycled or become landfill. This group therefore specifically aims to look at:

- Auditing existing waste and recycling activities within the parish,
- comparing how it performs against other parishes.
- Promoting and improving waste and recycling within the parish.
- Providing the community with information to make recycling and waste prevention easy.

At the heart of these aims are the three 'R's: REDUCE the amount consumed, REUSE things wherever possible, and then RECYCLE as much as possible. And with this in mind it is working towards a zero waste community.

It is seen that these aims will only be realised by engaging and involving the local community. Commitment to the three 'R's may necessitate a change in behaviour and attitude - and this takes time. The group's members, as committed reusers and recyclers, can lead by example.

An underlying message should be that 'every little helps', and the group seeks to encourage everyone to do their bit, however small this may be to begin with.

Working within Chew Magna and the surrounding villages in the Chew Valley, the recycling group's specific objectives are:

- To raise awareness of the environmental & financial costs related to waste
- Initiate new waste reduction schemes within the community
- Develop and deliver waste reduction projects and schemes
- Work in partnership with BANES Council where appropriate
- Provide facilities to make reuse and recycling easier
- To help to affect changes in behaviour where this is necessary (and possible).

2) People & Consumption Group

The transportation, distribution, and collection of food constitutes the biggest source of household carbon emissions in the UK and is twice that used for heating, lighting and daily car use. For this reason the People & Consumption Group, more usually called The Food Group, targets food-miles and aims to find ways to reduce them through promoting locally produced foods.

It has published a Local Food Directory detailing over 31 suppliers within a ten mile radius of Chew Magna and this has proved to be very successful in providing shopping choices closer to home.

Key Issues

A substantial amount of villagers' income is spent outside of the parish of Chew Magna. So this group aims to look at:

- Promoting a sustainable local economy.
- Promoting the local food economy - increasing the amount of food bought from as close by as possible.

- Promote the fact that consumers are powerful and can have enormous influence.
- Investigate a skills swapping scheme within the Parish.

The Local Food Guide

The guide is designed to promote locally-produced foods and other local suppliers within a ten mile radius of Chew Magna.

By increasing the awareness of the great food on the doorstep it becomes easier for everyone to choose a local option when considering where to buy food. Reducing the miles the food travels to get to the shops and the miles travelled by customers to collect it is one sure way of reducing the need for transportation.

3) Energy and Transport Group

In the UK each person on average creates 10 tonnes of carbon dioxide waste a year. This group aimed to look at:

- Raising awareness of energy use and its consequences.
- Reducing energy consumption within homes, businesses and schools.
- Promoting renewable energy projects.
- Promoting 'carbon neutral' wherever it is possible.
- Examining the possibilities of undertaking an energy audit of all households who are willing to participate, with a view to identifying the most pressing problems and finding affordable financing options to enable improvements.
- Developing a transport plan to minimize congestion and car use throughout the parish and improve bus links to Bristol and Bath.

One of the practical ways in which Go Zero has sought to improve transportation has been its Dragonflyer service the aim of which has been to take advantage of spare capacity aboard the luxury Airport Flyer coach as it carries passengers between Bristol and Bristol airport.

By organising mini-buses to run between Chew Magna and Bristol airport it becomes possible for local residents to get into Bristol without using their cars. This has involved forming Dragon Flyer Ltd as a community enterprise company to run the mini-bus service and to provide bus passes for use on the Airport Flyer.

At present, says Ian Roderick 'this has a few subscribers who are near the airport. The main problem for Chew Magna has been the link from the village to the airport. Various possibilities are still on the cards, the local taxi company is offering reduced rates for young people in the evening. The company is also involved in car clubs and any other ways to improve transport. I'm not sure much will happen until it becomes more difficult and /or expensive for people to own and use cars.'

4) The converging world group

Chew Magna already had formal and informal links with a number of communities in the developing world. This group has set out to look at:

- How the village might learn from those communities and how they might learn from it.
- Promoting issues relating to fair trade.
- Providing opportunities for further twinning and partnership working.

The Converging World Group has a number of visions:

- To support existing campaigns and initiatives for social justice and development – like Make Poverty History - and local efforts in the Chew Valley to alleviate poverty and improve healthcare in the 'South'.
- To develop personal links between the Go Zero community and Social Change and Development (SCAD) in Tamil Nadu.
- To promote ecotourism and sustainable travel.
- To promote and encouraging fair trade and obtain FairTrade Village status.

The Converging World idea (derived largely from the Contraction and Convergence principle promoted by the Global Commons Institute) goes beyond carbon trading, although this is a fundamental aspect requiring emergency attention. It is a vision of a world where everyone has a fair and equal share of all the resources that the Earth can easily provide without jeopardising its potential to support life in all its diversity.

The Tamil Nadu and the SCAD Project

Tamil Nadu is a state in Southern India with a population equivalent to that of the UK. Around the

district of Tirunelveli a remarkable community support organisation has developed called SCAD, (Social Change and Development) that seeks to bring about positive change through encouraging people to take responsibility for their own lives and the lives of others.

SCAD is a non-governmental organisation that currently supports and links 450 communities in the area. They reach out to some of the poorest and most marginalised people in India providing a programme of education, training, and development.

GoZero has close associations with this organisation because it supports communities in action and reflects the values to which Go Zero aspires; to respect both people and the planet. There is a common desire to link communities in both the developed and developing world at grass roots recognising the gain from sharing ideas and experience.

Cletus Babu who heads the organisation has visited and spoken in Chew Magna and has hosted return visits from members of village community. During a visit to India in January 2006 a number of opportunities to work together were discussed.

One of these was Tree Link

Carbon Offset funds raised in the local Chew Magna community can be used to support the planting of new timber and fruit farm plantations in Tamil Nadu. An acre of newly planted woodland costs a fraction of one planted in the UK. And it can support viable and sustainable living in Tamil Nadu as well as provide shade for livestock, increase biodiversity and improve the local water table.

Junior Zero

Providing a sustainable future for our children is at the heart of Go Zero as it seeks to create initiatives to safeguard the planet and reduce our personal impact on the Earth's fragile natural resources.

Junior Zero brings children and families together to work towards a zero waste community. Each Go Zero group is developing projects for children at home and within schools. There is also an interest in encouraging gap-year and newly graduated young people of the village to bring their youth and enthusiasm to the project.

Go Zero is also involved with The Growing Schools

campaign, the National scheme to raise the awareness in children of where their food comes from. Through its Food Group, it is working with local schools to offer more opportunities for children to understand the cycle of food from the soil to the plate.

Also through its links with Africa and India it offers opportunities for children to find out what life is like in other parts of the world.

GZ Carbon Offset Fund

As already stated, the lifestyle of a typical UK person contributes about 10 tonnes of carbon dioxide into the earth's atmosphere each year.

The Go Zero Carbon Offset Fund provides an opportunity for these emissions to be offset by the funding of sustainable energy and tree planting projects.

What is the Go Zero Carbon Offset Fund?

The Go Zero Carbon Offset Fund addresses what is probably the biggest threat of all, global warming caused by carbon emissions. An essential part of aiming for zero waste is to become carbon neutral, which means offsetting any unavoidable carbon emissions. There are many schemes that enable this to be done either by preventing the release of greenhouse gases or by capturing carbon dioxide from the air.

The Tamil Nadu crop-tree planting scheme already identified both captures carbon dioxide by tree growth and provides fruits and nuts that contribute to the economic development of the area. The Go Zero Offset Fund received donations from anyone who feels part of the Go Zero Project. The amount donated is based on the giver's own estimates of carbon emissions created by a household during each year, and from time spend flying.

Encouraging individuals to offset their carbon emissions

Donations to the fund are voluntary, self-assessed and confidential – only the total amount of money put into the fund will ever be published. The money raised will be spent on schemes decided by the Go Zero Steering Group in an open and fully transparent way.

The scheme is based on the concept of an average household running one car. The average household output is reckoned as being four units.

Each household is invited to estimate how many units it thinks it represents. For example for someone living in a small flat and not having a car then that would be 1 unit. For someone living in a mansion with many cars it could be 10 units or more.

Each unit is a £25 donation per year, so an average household would donate £100 per year.

In addition a donation of £1 is suggested for every hour each person in the household spends flying. So New York and back would be about £10.

If a member wishes, they can make a more precise estimate of their carbon emissions using one of the many online calculators, and base their donation on that.

One of the more recent examples of attempts by Go Zero to involve villagers has been its teaming up with CarbonSense. This organisation seeks to show householders how a 'lifestyle make-over' can bring energy and carbon emission savings.

At a Go-Zero open day half a dozen volunteer households agreed to have explained to them the consequences of 'carrying on as usual'. They were then shown how easily they could contribute to making savings through simple actions. These included fitting low-energy light bulbs, changing to a green energy supplier, improving insulation and switching off appliances. The next stage would then call for more fundamental decisions relating to car and fuel usage.

At the time the quarterly Go Zero newsletter stated: 'We will follow what happens, finding out the problems, what barriers get in the way of making changes to reducing carbon emissions, and discovering ways to overcome them. Whatever we discover we will use in the next phase which will be to spread the concept of 'make-over' as widely as we can throughout the valley and beyond.'

More recently Ian Roderick has commented that the Carbon Makeover 'was an interesting exercise.'

'We received a report from Carbonsense after they did a follow up study on the households to see what effect the visit had made. The results were not much change. They had affected awareness but not motivated any of the households to do anything major. We felt that our efforts would be better spend just working more generally in the community rather than targeting one by one – it was also expensive.'

Structure and management

Inevitably, running Go Zero has depended on the dedication of a small core of regular supporters, estimated between 30 and 40, with an outer ring of around 100 interested people. Of the rest, says Ian Roderick, quite a few have come along to some events out of curiosity.

'We have evolved through stages, mostly chaotic. At an early meeting of 50 or so people in the skittle alley we decided to split into four groups and we ran with these for quite a while. They still exist in theory. We also formed a steering group that originally consisted of whoever turned up. This became more formal and 11 people now make up this group. These 11 are the directors of Go Zero Ltd – a non-profit company formed to handle the accountability and governance of Go Zero.

The steering group meets every few weeks and this has become what is called a 4-in-1 open meeting, instead of each group having their own meetings. These open meetings usually have a main speaker and then the four groups each report on activities. There is most recently a further move towards a more project-based way of working. An example is the Fairtrade project where an active group is pressing ahead to get Fairtrade village status; the Chamber of Commerce and the Parish Council on board and many local traders are supporting this.

Communications

The main mechanism for communication is the e-mail list for the 160 people who have signed up to it. E-mail is essential for the steering group.

According to Ian Roderick 'The Go Zero website cost a lot and is very professional. However its main purpose, I think, is to inform people from outside. I guess few people in the village look at it regularly.'

The work of Go Zero's focus groups is supported by a Publicity and Communications team which is tasked with publishing a quarterly newsletter to keep the whole parish informed and to give everyone a forum for their own opinions and ideas.

'At one time we went off issuing a newsletter, but that is now coming back into favour as people are beginning to ask what has happened to Go Zero. Posters stuck up around the village work well for meetings.'

The long haul

One of the messages to have come out of the Go Zero project, says Ian Roderick is 'that we are in for the long-haul. It is going to be 15-20 years before we notice

massive changes. If you look at the economies of the world they are like massive super tankers. You can't suddenly turn them round. All you can do is start nudging their noses. We have a little mantra: *Patience, No blame, You can do it.* That sums up how we are to proceed.'

**Brian Kellock
October 2006.**

For the latest information visit the Go Zero website www.gozero.org or contact Ian Roderick (01275 333455 or mail@dovetail.uk).