

TOWN OR COUNTRY I DID IT MY WAY

How can you cut carbon dioxide emissions in your neighbourhood? In all sorts of creative ways, reckon Friends of the Earth local groups in Manchester and rural Bishop's Castle. Report by Lindsey Russell

“ COUNTRY: Bishop's Castle

"A lot of people here are very environmentally conscious – it's not an area full of large, extravagant houses with drives lined with sports cars," says Alan Terrill, Co-ordinator of Bishop's Castle Friends of the Earth. So it was a big surprise when a survey revealed this small rural town on the Shropshire/Welsh borders to be emitting 40 per cent more carbon dioxide (CO₂) than the national average.

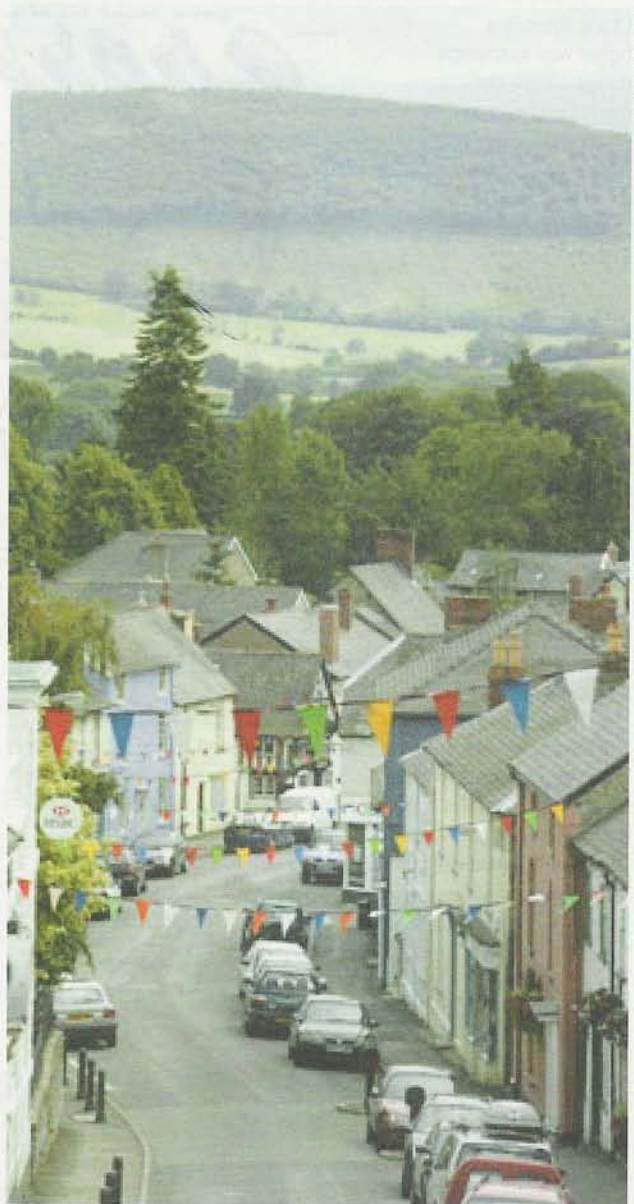
The survey was conducted by the Wasteless Society, a local environmental group, in collaboration with the local Friends of the Earth, with a grant from the Energy Saving Trust and free training from the Marches Energy Agency. Armed with statistics about the size and source of the problem, energy activists then set about transforming Bishop's Castle into a lower-carbon economy.

To enlist the support of local residents the Wasteless Society (www.wasteless.co.uk) held public meetings and information events. "People cared about the environment and wanted to do something, but didn't know how," says Alan. "Many households use coal for heating, as there's no mains gas. Public transport is fairly sparse and there are a lot of old, poorly insulated houses. But as we became a focus for environmental concerns, more people started to drift into meetings."

Highlight of the campaign so far has been the introduction of a 100 per cent biodiesel fuel pump at Union Street Garage. "At last we have something to show for two years of meetings and grant applications, and it's helping to keep a small local garage alive," says Alan. The carbon-neutral biodiesel, which sells at 90p/litre, is made from locally sourced, used rapeseed oil and biodegrades 98 per cent within three weeks. Other low-carbon measures look set to include an Energy Services Club offering advice on how to lower household emissions, with every interested home receiving a custom-made report and help with grants; car-sharing schemes; cycle paths; local food initiatives; and a surge in small-scale and community-scale energy production.

A bonus to the project is the sense of community it has fostered. Bishop's Castle Friends of the Earth used to have nine members, now it has around 100. "We want this project to act as a catalyst for other areas to feel 'we can do it too'," says Alan.

Manchester and Bishop's Castle are tackling climate change and local issues in very different ways. What would suit your area? If you've got some ideas why don't you join in? Find details of your nearest local group on <http://community.foe.co.uk> or call 020 7490 1555.



John James/Alamy

Country dilemma at Bishop's Castle: does no mains gas excuse super high CO₂ emissions? Join our website poll at www.foe.co.uk/living/poundsavers/town_country.html.