

How to Cut Carbon Footprint? This Village Shows the Way

This small village of about 1,000 people looks like any other nestled in the countryside. But Ashton Hayes is different in an important way when it comes to one of the world's most pressing issues: climate change. Hundreds of residents have banded together to cut greenhouse emissions -they use clotheslines instead of dryers, take fewer flights, install solar panels and glaze windows to better insulate their homes.

The effort, reaching its 10th anniversary this year, has led to a 24% cut in emissions, according to surveys by a professor of environmental sustainability who lives here. But what makes Ashton Hayes unusual is its approach -the residents have done it themselves, without prodding from government. About 200 towns, cities and counties around the world -including Notteroy , Norway; Upper Saddle River, New Jersey .; and Changhua County , Taiwan -have reached out to learn how the villagers here did it. As climate science has become more accepted, and the effects of a warming planet are becoming increasingly clear, Ashton Hayes is a case study for the next phase of battling climate change: getting people to change their habits. "We just think everyone should try to clean up their patch," said Rosemary Dossett, a resident of the village. One of their secrets, it seems, is that the people of Ashton Hayes feel in charge, rather than following government policies.

The project was started by Garry Charnock, a former journalist who trained as a hydrologist and has lived in the village for about 30 years. He got the idea a little more than a decade ago after attending a lecture about climate change at the Hay Festival in Wales. He decided to try to get Ashton Hayes to become, as he put it, "Britain's first carbon-neutral village." In Ashton Hayes -25 miles southeast of Liverpool -the villagers have lightened the mood. They hold public wine-and-cheese meetings in the biggest houses in town, "so everyone can have a look around," and see how the wealthier people live, said Charnock, the executive director of RSK, an environmental consulting company . "We don't ever finger-wag in Ashton Hayes". About 650 people showed up to the first meeting, Charnock said. Some in the village were less keen, but now more started to participate.

Some have gone further. When they were looking to build their energy-efficient home and heard about Ashton Hayes's carbon-neutral project, Dossett and her husband, Ian, thought it might be the perfect village for them. They moved from nearby South Warrington and found two old farm cottages, which they converted into a two-storey brick house, and installed huge triple-glazed windows, photovoltaic cells on the roof, a geothermal heat pump that heats the home and its water, and an underground cistern to hold rainwater for toilets and the garden. The Dossetts also have a vegetable garden, grow grapes for wine, brew beer and keep two cows, which mow the lawn and may also eventually become food in a few years. They pay about £500 (\$650) a year for electricity and heating. The success of the carbon-neutral project seems to have inspired other community efforts in Ashton Hayes. The residents, for example, have built a new playing field with a solar-powered pavilion, which is the home of a community cafe three days a week. They have also put photovoltaic solar panels on the roof of the primary school.

Other towns and cities around the world hope to copy Ashton Hayes. Eden Mills, a small community in Ontario, Canada, is one of them. Charles Simon travelled to Ashton Hayes in 2007 to learn how to translate their approach to his town. Eden Mills has cut emissions by about 14%, Simon said. Janet Gullvaag, a councilwoman in Notteroy, Norway, reached out to Ashton Hayes about nine years ago. Gullvaag said adopting

Ashton Hayes's mantra has seen changes in her community as people buy more electric cars and bicycles, and convert their home heating from oil to more environmentally friendly sources.

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