



Community Action Groups Quickstart Guide

The CAG network consists of over 50 groups across Oxfordshire at the forefront of community led climate change action, organising events and projects to take action on issues including waste, transport, food, energy and biodiversity. The network runs over 365 events per year, attended by over 60,000 local residents.

The CAG support team provides hands-on, day to day help and advice for groups. If you would like to find out more contact the CAG Project: www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk



1 Setting up your group

What do you need?

- the key ingredients to a successful community group

How to get it

- who to contact and how

How to keep it

- maintaining momentum and planning ahead

2 Running your group

Funding

- find it, get it and use it!

Events

- what to do before, during and after a successful event

Publicity

- spread your message far and wide

3 Other resources

Measuring your group's impact

- how to measure what your group is doing

Organisations

- who is out there and how can they help you?

Resources

- Physical and online

Setting up your group

what do you need?

People

To state the obvious: people are important. While it's not always the case that more people means a better group, good numbers can really help with sharing the load, creating ideas and keeping everyone motivated.

When setting up your CAG you will need to appoint people to fulfil certain key roles in the group. Most notably these are Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. The CAG Project holds training to help members to familiarise themselves with the roles of chair and treasurer, and more details of these can be obtained by contacting the project staff. However, the roles of key people in your group can be summarised as follows:

chairperson

around 10 hours per month



- To give leadership and direction to the group, where appropriate, and to ensure the group 'happens'.
- To have an overview of all that goes on, but not necessarily all the detail.
- To delegate tasks and to ensure all members feel involved and participate.
- To ensure no member is 'over involved' and in danger of preventing others from participating.
- To take responsibility for ensuring the group have enough members to undertake the activities, or, ensure that the group only undertakes what capacity it possesses.
- To be a signatory on cheques and any other 'official' documents.
- To encourage social interaction (informal as well as formal) - one reason groups do not sometimes work effectively is because the individuals do not know each other.

secretary

around 3-5 hours per month



- To take minutes and look after general administration arising from meetings. You might want this to be a 'rolling' role.
- To note all correspondence (in and out) on the agenda for forthcoming meetings.
- To keep the membership lists up to date.
- To convene meetings and prepare agendas.
- To record names of those in attendance and apologies for non-attendance.
- To write up minutes as soon as possible after meetings—when the discussions are fresh in your mind!
- To oversee the production of the Annual Report.
- To make arrangements for the Annual General meeting.
- To send reports of meetings to the press where appropriate.

treasurer

around 1-2 hours per month



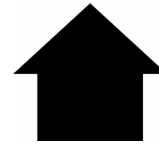
- To keep records of the finances of the group and be the key point of contact with regards to financial matters arising.
- To apply for the CAG grant each year.
- To ensure that end-of-year accounts are submitted to the CAG Project at the end of the financial year. (The CAG financial year runs from 1st April to 31st March. Accounts should be returned to the CAG Project Manager as soon as possible after this date. The accounts need to be independently examined by somebody who is not a relative or part of your group, and understands financial accounting. This does not need to be a registered accountant and if you cannot find an independent examiner, the CAG Project can do this for you.)
- To set up a group bank account. (CAG officers are happy to help on a one to one basis on how to open a bank account and set up your annual accounts).

Setting up your group

what do you need?

Space

Groups can run in pubs, houses, halls or anywhere else with somewhere to sit, be comfortable and talk. Some spaces cost money to hire, however, and some can be too big, or too small, for the purpose of a meeting.



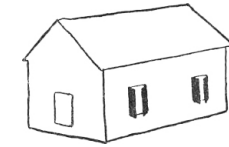
member's house

Comfortable
Free



pub

Free (usually)
Neutral and social venue



village hall

Neutral and social venue
Large enough for big numbers

pros

cons

Limiting on numbers
Unlikely to welcome
new members

Potentially noisy
Alcohol not always
conducive to action

Costs money (usually)
Can be too big for a small meeting

Structure

A functioning community group needs a constitution. This document, written in agreement with the group members, will outline the aims and objectives of the group, as well as details on how the group will operate.

Eventually a group may develop into a new structure, for example a social enterprise or community interest company, but to begin with a constitution gives the group a common voice.

On the Community Action Groups website groups can download a sample constitution and an example group agreement which can easily be adapted to meet the specific needs of the group

www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk

Constitution checklist

Most funders and partner organisations (including the CAG Project) will require your group to have a constitution - here's what you need:

1. Name of the organisation
2. Aims or objectives of the organisation - what are you hoping to achieve?
3. Membership - who can join and how?
4. Management Committee - who makes the decisions?
5. Officers - e.g. Chair, Secretary and Treasurer
6. Meetings - how often and in what format?
7. Finance - who can access the money and how?
8. Dissolution - what happens when the group ends?
9. Amendments to the constitution - how can you change if the group requires it?

Setting up your group

how to get it

People

Whilst your CAG will have a core group of people, in order to involve the whole community more successfully your group should have an open door policy with regards to membership and you might want to actively try to recruit more members. The more diverse your range of members in regards of age, sex, race, etc, the better is your picture of how issues affect the entire community. Try to engage those sections of the population that might not otherwise become involved. You can work in tandem with other organisations to more effectively do this. For example, you might seek help and guidance from the Youth Service if you wanted to work with the young people in your area.

CAG volunteers may fall into 3 categories:

Core members

decision makers – ideally about 5-6

Main helpers at events

possibly another 6-12

Other interested people

for example on mailing list and helping occasionally

Each group has a different level of knowledge and commitment and to recruit volunteers for each category may require a different method. It is also good to look at your group as a whole and decide what the public perception of your group is.

The 3 main ways of recruiting people are: Targeted, ripple and shotgun

targeted

Get messages to specific people. Talk to people one to one at CAG events, or public spaces such as libraries or schools, work or schools.

ripple

One member gets another member, volunteer asks another person to volunteer, everyone brings a friend. Existing members must have details of your group's volunteer role description so that the message remains constant. If you have some literature or a link to a website this might be helpful.

shotgun

Just fire out messages, for instance general press releases (see publicity section). This takes a lot of effort but goes beyond normal boundaries and may attract a different type of individual.

Examples of groups you may like to contact include:

- Local residents associations – what are their concerns about the local environment?
- Schools and colleges – Is the school working towards Eco-School accreditation?
- Church groups, friends of groups – look at all the groups in your area.
- Youth groups such as the Scouts & Guides – Could you encourage them to help set up an event aimed specifically at young people?
- Membership groups, such as The Co-operative – What are their specific interests and how do they relate to climate change and waste issues?

Setting up your group

how to keep it

Volunteers

Retaining volunteers very much depends on volunteer satisfaction, the benefits and reasons why people do not volunteer. Remember to keep volunteers informed of your group activities; make sure nobody feels left out. Occasional socials work wonders.

Offer training, this can be very informal but it is good to offer opportunities for skills which will benefit volunteers in their lives outside the group. CAG and other organisations run suitable training courses, contact the CAG Project Team if you are interested.

Are your volunteers satisfied with what they are doing? Never take volunteers for granted and thank, thank and thank again!

Meetings

Meetings are the real driving force of a group, where decisions are made and success is reported.

Simply getting people together to talk is a great way to keep a group going, but the opportunity presented by regular meetings is for much more.

- When arranging meetings: Give at least 2 weeks notice of the date, time and venue, asking people to confirm their attendance in advance. Remember to let the CAG Project staff know when you are meeting and if you would like one of them to attend.
- Arrange a time that suits both those employed and those with children.
- Choose a suitable venue, preferably with good public transport links. Before the meeting the chairperson should circulate an agenda, allowing 7 days for people to make any comments or add an item. They should make sure the purpose of the meeting is clear, and that it is achieved, as well as agreeing its length.
- The chair should conduct meetings efficiently, and facilitate discussion without monopolising it, making sure that everyone has the chance to air his or her views.
- The meeting should also be properly recorded by the Secretary, and minutes / notes agreed by the chair afterwards.
- Keep the meeting to time and where possible, try to achieve a good balance between formal business & informal social interaction. Working together as a CAG should be enjoyable!
- Make sure to involve new members right from the start. Introduce them to others, and ask members to introduce themselves to the new person.
- At the end of each discussion, summarise decisions that have been reached and clearly identify them and who is responsible for action and implementation.

'Difficult' characters to avoid

- the talker** talks at, talks over and talks above other people
- the know-all** offers opinion as fact and discourages input from others
- the criticiser** is negative about the groups plans and ideas, without offering alternatives or explanations

There are many different ways of constructively working people such as these – speak to a CAG officer if you need ideas or help.

Remember! Send the CAG Project a brief record of your meeting and particularly any dates that you chose for future events so that they can be put on the website.

Running your group funding

Annual Maintenance Grant

There is an annual maintenance grant available of £250 for each CAG. This is to assist with covering the day to day expenses incurred in running your group. For example: printing, photocopying, telephone calls, refreshments, room hire, travel and events that can comfortably be covered by this grant. It is available annually from 1st April onwards. The grant is not automatically paid to each group so you must claim this money by filling in a simple application form, downloadable from the CAG admin Files on the website: www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk.

Insurance for events

CAGs are covered by an umbrella insurance policy, for which Resource Futures deducts £50 (in 2011) from your grant. The CAG insurance covers public, employer (volunteer) & product liability to the statutory levels. For more information about the specifics of this policy, please contact a member of the CAG Project. If you need insurance and do not need to claim a full grant, you can simply apply for the money to pay for the cover. If you have your own insurance policy the CAG Project will need a copy of your cover note and will then exempt your group from paying toward the group policy.

Special Projects Fund

There is also a Special Projects Fund for to help finance projects or initiatives that require funding beyond that of the annual maintenance grant. Examples include: Materials for a project, purchasing banners or display materials, printing costs, hiring a trainer for a workshop. Please note that in order to fulfil funding criteria, evidence must be produced to show how the grant money has been spent. Evidence might include photographs, press releases, numbers of people attending / participating, etc. It can take up to 3 weeks for money to be transferred into your account and therefore a claim form for a special project grant needs to be completed well in advance of any project or event.

Other funding sources

Often a group may have an idea for a project or initiative that requires financial support beyond that offered by the CAG Project. There are many local and national funding bodies that offer money to help community projects and help is available through the CAG Project to help you through the application process. Money from the special projects fund may also be used to 'match fund' against a larger funding application. Some funding bodies also allow you to attribute an hourly rate to volunteer time spent on a project to use in the same way. There are far too many individual funders to list here but we regularly email CAGs with details of new funding opportunities. Please contact the CAG Project Team for more information: www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk.

Important information for CAG Treasurers

The CAG project is managed by Resource Futures who are accountable for the funds spent on the Project. The CAG project is currently funded by Local Government; therefore you are accountable for public money. Full support for managing the group's accounts is available from the CAG Project Team, training is available along with example spreadsheets and record keeping systems. The CAG financial year runs from 1st April to 31st March. Accounts should be returned to the CAG Project as soon as possible after the end of the financial year. Please let us know as soon as possible if there is likely to be a problem in doing this as we are unable to distribute the next year's grants to anyone until all previous year's accounts are received.

Running your group events

Why? Events are a great way to attract new members, tell the public about what you are doing and have some fun!

Risk Assessments

When organising an event attended by the general public, it is necessary to complete a risk assessment. A risk assessment (RA) is an important step in protecting your group members and the general public, as well as complying with the law. It helps you focus on the risks that really matter at your events – the ones with the potential to cause real harm. In many instances, straightforward measures can readily control risks, for example ensuring spillages are cleaned up promptly so people do not slip, or cabling is kept tidy to ensure people do not trip.

There are 2 main reasons for completing a RA. Firstly, it is an opportunity to stand back before your event and assess it through clear eyes. This hopefully means that you won't have to worry about potential hazards during the actual event when you may not have much time or be under pressure to perform other duties. Secondly, in the unfortunate event of an accident resulting in an insurance claim being made against your group, a risk assessment will have helped you identify potential hazards prior to the event and therefore you are unlikely to be found negligent. Note that an insurance company may ask to see a copy of your RA in the event of any claim.

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. You are not expected to eliminate all risk, but you are required to protect people as far as 'reasonably practicable'.

Full details on how to complete a risk assessment, and example forms which can be copied and completed can be found on the CAG website. If you are unsure about anything then contact the CAG Project Team:

www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk

events checklist

before

- ❑ Determine the purpose of the event – what, why and for whom?
- ❑ Choose a convenient date - try not to clash with other important events in your area
- ❑ Choose a suitable venue – ascertain what facilities you will need at the venue, disabled access, parking and public transport links, etc.
- ❑ Work out how many volunteers you need and make sure that you have sufficient - it is always best to have too many than not enough.
- ❑ Make sure you have all the equipment you need – e.g. a sign in sheet to collect contact details, screen and projector for a film screening, pencils and paper if you want people to take notes (or hand outs)
- ❑ Carry out a risk assessment and act upon it to reduce potential problems. Does your insurance cover the activities you want to do?
- ❑ Log onto the CAG data portal (more details in Section 3) to generate a questionnaire for your activity and see the information you need to collect
- ❑ Advertise, advertise and advertise! If you want people to attend your event you have to let them know (see publicity section)

during

- ❑ Use the portal questionnaire to collect all the information you need at the event. This not only helps you to evaluate your event but this kind of information that the CAG Project needs to know and is vital to securing future project funding and therefore crucial to the continuation of the CAG Project.
- ❑ At the event try and take photos – these are brilliant for future publicity – make sure you have written photo permission for under 18s and it is always best to ask permission even if you are photographing adults. (the CAG photo permission form can be downloaded from the CAG website)

after

- ❑ Log onto the CAG data portal and submit your data from the event to receive an estimate of the impact of the activity
- ❑ At your next meeting discuss how things went and what you can learn from the event to improve the next one.

Running your group

publicity



Publicity means getting your CAG mentioned in any form of media, that's newspapers, radio, television, on the web or in newsletters, parish magazines and local publications. Publicity also covers posters, advertising, information and leaflets.

The main object of publicity for your CAG is to get people to think about and ultimately act on what your group is doing. The more often a member of the public reads or hears about – or sees – the activities of your group, the more likely they are to start thinking about the message behind the activities.

The benefits of gaining publicity for your CAG are:

- ✓ Get more people interested and involved in your activities, which results in more volunteers
- ✓ Spread the message about environmental issues
- ✓ Help people to make better use of facilities and knowledge available
- ✓ Pass on information
- ✓ Good way to gain new members
- ✓ Make it easier to gain funds from grant giving bodies

If you have personal contact with anyone who has access to either the press, radio or local publications such as community newsletters or parish magazines, this is an excellent way to get yourself coverage.

If you wish to reach as many possible sources of publicity as possible in one go, the usual way to do this is to produce what is called a press release. This is basically an article that you write including all the information that you would like to get out there; journalists will use parts of it if they decide to go with the story.

Press releases are not only used for press but also for radio and television as the main purpose of the press release is to give the information of your story.

Principles of a press release

For examples see the CAG website: www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk.

Identify your main message and be clear about its newsworthiness – it is news if it is:

- a milestone - the first, the biggest, the oldest, records are broken, targets exceeded, something is launched etc.
- an event – giveaways, stands, open days, shreddings, swap shops etc.
- contains statistics – new statistics about, say how many tonnes or kilos your swap shop diverted from land fill, or how many people took part in your litter pick.
- something is new – you have launched a new web-site, newsletter, internet group etc
- if your story is 'reactive' to something in the media – for example if a councillor makes a well publicised comment about recycling rates being too low you can react to this with your story about waste reduction activities

You can include a good photograph – if an event or activity your CAG does is visually interesting (which they usually are!) it may be worth trying to get local press to send a photographer along to cover the story

Use a good title/headline that will make the reader want to read more

Cover the five Ws: who, what, when, where and why – concisely and without going on and on.

Keep it brief – no more than a page

Use clear, confident language and short words and sentences. A good rule is: one message per sentence.

Try to include quotes or anecdotes to give the article a human interest angle (seek permission from the person quoted and be sure they are happy to be contacted by the media if they follow up the story) The press are more likely to be interested in publishing something if it has a human interest angle, rather than just facts and figures. It will also be more appealing to readers.

For best results, follow up a press release with a phone call.

Running your group

publicity



Radio interviews: Should you be given the opportunity to take part in a radio interview, make yourself a list of three points that you want to get across during that interview. You will usually not be given vast amounts of time on air so it is essential to get your main points across clearly and repeatedly to ensure the message is heard.

The CAG Project has an up to date list of contact details for the main publications in the Oxfordshire area. However there may be other useful publications particularly your church or parish newsletters which are not listed. Build relationships – get to know your press contacts. If you are keen to get coverage for your group try to find out who the local journalists are likely to cover your kind of story and make direct contact with them (bear in mind they may well be very pressed for time so don't be put off!).

Tips

- Never underestimate the power of local publications such as community newsletters and parish magazines, these often have a far higher readership than national newspapers will in your area.
- Watch and learn – Your CAG should read and watch your local media to get a feel for what sort of items get coverage and the tone to use for different audiences.
- If you are sending out a press release directly to media get to know your local paper's deadline. Deadlines differ for each publication and some may be up to 6 weeks in advance. Radio usually needs at least two weeks before the event. Follow it up or send it again two or three days before the event.

the web

More and more people are using the Internet to find out about events and activities. The CAG Project has its own website (www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk) which explains what the CAG Project is and has a directory of CAGs.

Each CAG has its own page and this is for you to personalise. As each CAG is unique and has different aims and objectives, it is important that you have input into what you would like on this page. Please contact the CAG Project officers with updates.

Alternatively you might like to have a short page about your group with a link to your own website. Websites are extremely effective means of communicating with the general public. You can add documents in pdf format to download, for instance newsletter or A-Zs of recycling, all of which helps to reduce paper copies. It is not as difficult as you might think and there are many people who are now happy with this technology.

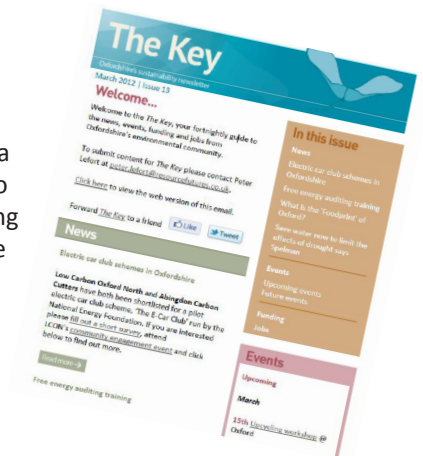
Social media is also an excellent engagement tool for reaching people you might otherwise miss. Facebook and Twitter are both used very effectively across the CAG network.

It is always good to ask around your volunteers and see who can help you. It would be an excellent way of getting somebody else involved.

There are also a number of organisations that can help you set up a website. OCVA give advice and instruction. Once you are up and running the CAG Project officers can organise a link from our website to yours.

the key

The Key is Oxfordshire's sustainability newsletter and is distributed to over 1,000 people across the county. It is a great opportunity for publicising your news or events, so make sure to contact the CAG Project Team with anything you would like to be included. For events, please include the date, time and venue with postal code so that it can be added to the website.



Other resources

measuring your group's impact

Why? CAGs in Oxfordshire put a great deal of time and effort into the activities they organise. In 2012-13 groups organised over 550 events across Oxfordshire with over 63,500 attendees. It is important to understand the effect that each group, and the collective CAG network, has through organising these activities which provide information, expertise and skills to their local communities.

Establishing a regular and consistent monitoring and evaluation process will have a number of benefits for a group. It can create:

A feedback mechanism

This will allow groups to monitor their own progress and provide motivation for the work they are doing, where previously their impact has been unreported.

Recommendations for future action

Findings can be used as a base for setting realistic and achievable targets and priorities.

Evidence for funding bids

Results can be used to validate activities and future plans in funding proposals, and also report achievements to existing funders.

Recommendations for national community action

Results can be used to inform national good practice allowing the CAG Network to have a wider impact on national community action on climate change.

How? To enable groups to measure the impact of their activities the CAG Project has developed the community impact modelling tool. Using information collected at activities and events we will be able to provide groups with an estimate of how their activities have reduced waste, energy consumption, carbon emissions and costs.

To help groups collect the information that we need for the modelling project we have developed an online data portal. This can be accessed at www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/data-portal. The data portal allows groups to generate questionnaires which will include all the information they need to collect for the activity they are hosting. Following the activity groups can log back in to the portal and report all the information gained in a quick and easy process. The portal will then generate an immediate estimate of the activities impact. A more accurate overview of a group's impact will be reported back on a periodic basis.

When? We would like groups to collect information about all the activities and events they organise. This includes both regular activities such as general meetings, green drinks, swap shops etc and one off and seasonal activities which may only occur once a year. Monitoring these activities is something that should be considered at all stages when planning the activity:

Before an activity use the data portal to check the information you need to collect. Whilst planning your activity it is important to record how many group members are involved with organising the event and how much time each member spends doing this. It is also useful to consider the information that needs to be collected on the day and how this will be done.

During an activity collect the information required in the questionnaire. You can also gauge people's reaction to the event, talk to participants and discuss with your group how the running of the activity went. All this information can be recorded in the comment box on the portal and can provide useful insight when planning similar events in the future.

After an activity it is important to log the data you have collected into the portal. This is better done as soon after the event as possible as things are still fresh in people's memories. When you have submitted this information into the portal you will receive a snap shot of your activities impact. This can be great to feedback to the group straight away so that everyone's time and hard work is rewarded with the results.

Other resources

measuring your group's impact

We'd like your comments...

About activities

Using the comment box when entering information into the portal is a great way to let us know the little details about an event which really made a difference. Recording these details here means we can use and share them for the benefit of the wider network.

About the modelling project

When collecting information about an activity did you feel there was something missing that should have been collected? Was your activity included in the modelling project? Were you happy collecting the required information? Give us your comments so we can improve the modelling tool and ensure it delivers the information that groups would like to know.

If you have any issues using the portal or any feedback please contact Peter.Lefort@resourcefutures.co.uk

portal cheat sheet

- Go to: <http://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/data-portal>
- Login using your group's username and password

before an activity

- Click 'Plan or report a new activity/event'
- Find the activity and select 'Questionnaire'
- The generated questionnaire will include all the information needed about the activity

during an activity

- Use the questionnaire to collect the required information

after an activity

- Click 'Plan or report a new activity/event'
- Find the activity and select 'Submit data'
- Enter the data into the form
- When saved a results page will appear giving an estimate of the impact of the activity. A more comprehensive estimation of your group's impact will be given periodically

Other resources

Organisations

A comprehensive list can be found on the CAG website, but here are a few external organisations which can help you get started:

Low Carbon Hub

An Oxfordshire-based organisation providing a hub where communities can find a route to all they need to take action on climate change.
www.lowcarbonhub.org

Energy Saving Trust

Provides free impartial advice on reducing CO2 emissions from your home. For free, independent and local energy saving advice call 0800512012
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Low Carbon Communities Network

Aim to encourage the adoption of low carbon and zero carbon technologies and lifestyles at a community level and to enable groups engaged in this to be as effective as possible.
www.lowcarboncommunities.net

Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA)

The main umbrella organisation for the voluntary and community sector in Oxfordshire. They provide advice, information and training.
www.oxnet.org.uk

Online

Online resources update constantly, so keep your eyes open for new ones. Here are some very useful places to start:

Low Carbon Communities Handbook

A comprehensive guide to running events, getting diverse volunteers, project ideas and resources and everything an Oxfordshire-based community group needs to know.
www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/downloads/category/1-cag-admin-files

Show me the carbon

A fantastic interactive tool showing the carbon impact in everyday choices and practical ways to improve them.
www.edenproject.com/whats-it-all-about/climate-and-environment/show-me-the-carbon

The Key

Oxfordshire's sustainability newsletter, produced by CAG and the Low Carbon Hub, providing the latest news, events, jobs and funding opportunities.
www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/newsletter

DinnerTime

A brand new community kitchen model with a step-by-step guide.
www.itsdinnertime.org

Cocoon Your Home

An independent not-for-profit advice service which can analyse local rooves and suggest solar installation ideas.
www.cocoonyourhome.co.uk

Physical

Please let the CAG Project officers know when you would like to borrow equipment from the Project and we can then discuss means of getting it to you or your event and its return:

Apple press

For making excellent apple (or pear) juice from local crops, includes mill and pasteuriser.

Cycle-powered smoothie maker

Demonstrate the power of pedalling while making fresh fruit smoothies.

Thermal imaging camera (via Oxfordshire County Council)

Show residents where heat is leaking from their homes, a great project and engagement tool.

Banners

Pop up stands and swap shop banners.

Portable Appliance Testers (PAT)

Rechargeable units for testing the safety of domestic electrical items. Please note: these are only available to qualified testers.

Films

Including: An Inconvenient Truth, The Convenient Solution, A Farm for the Future, Beyond the Tipping Point.

Books

Including: Power, Process and Participation; Tools for change.

Games

Including: Carbon Conversations games, Low-Carbon Home, Travel Dilemmas, Food Footprints.