

GOING GREEN IN FARINGDON

GMTF Look and Learn visit to Faringdon June 2010

Report by Janet Marrott
Photos by Chris Howell

FIFTEEN representatives from ten of our member towns visited Friar's Court, Clanfield on 17th June to learn how the Faringdon Project set up their Ecoweek, the project that received the overall National Award from Action for Market Towns at last Autumn's Conference.

Faringdon is situated just over the Oxfordshire border from Lechlade, our most easterly member town. The long journey for some members and the five and a half hours spent at the farm of John Willmer and his son Charles was worth all the effort.

activities to interest all ages. Step Farm was the very first Soil Association certified organic farm, having been organic since 1982. Owner Daphne Saunders recalled how her family were told that would regret taking this step. The area now boasts the highest percentage of organic farms in the country.



Daphne informed us that pressure from local farmers has resulted in local meat being used in all schools throughout Oxfordshire. During further conversation we learned that three organic farms could supply the entire needs of carrots to serve all the schools in the county. This was one example of how needs can be met without food been transported for miles.

HOW ECOWEEK BEGAN

Ecoweek had begun by local people getting together to share examples of Best Practice. The first Ecofair was organised so that neighbour could talk to neighbour, rather than have salesmen trying to outdo each other. It has now grown to a week-long series of events showcasing anything that can benefit the local economy and, even more importantly, the environment. The whole ethos began through the group supporting less fortunate people in Africa.

We heard from John Willmer how he first became interested in the use of solar power to dry his grain harvest and then went on to introduce other methods of using the sun's energy around the farm. If ever there is a man to inspire people! John will celebrate his 90th birthday in August. A

Faringdon ECOWEEK June 12-18th 2010

ECOWEEK 2010

The Urban-Rural Hub Around Faringdon 12-18th June 2010

Welcome to ECOWEEK!

BE HAPPIER, HEALTHIER & BETTER OFF BY LIVING MORE SUSTAINABLY!
BLOOM & BLESS FARINGDON ECOWEEK WINE NATIONAL MARKET TOWNS AWARDS

Looking for ways to reduce your impact on the environment? Trying to live more sustainably? Then Faringdon ECOWEEK is for YOU! Check out the CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

ECOWEEK 2010 kicks off on the opening Saturday with **ECOSWAP** (Swap Shop - Bring, Take, Swap), a big **ECOFAIR** (bringing together eco-suppliers and eco-organisations) and **ECOGROW** (open allotments and local food).

The family-friendly **ECOLAMBS** at Friar's Court near Clanfield leads in to **ECOTALK** where the new Green MEP Keith Taylor will be speaking about our Urban-Rural Partnership.

Under the **ECOSCHOOLS** banner, the schools will also be taking an active part in the ECOWEEK, as will the Churches. Fancy dancing - come to **ECODANCE**. Or a horticultural tour with tractor ride? Go to **ECOFEST** at Coleshill.

And, on the final Saturday of the ECOWEEK - the **ECOFEST & ECOWALKS** (a petition of amateur cyclists & walkers - all abilities and ages welcome) will roll & stroll off from the Market Square first thing in the morning, going around a selection of **ECOFARMS** (there are fourteen organic farms within just two miles of Faringdon, heading up at **ECOWIND** - the cooperatively owned Westmill Wind Farm).

The **Windfarm Open Day** on the 18th of June will have MANY activities for ALL ages, FREE entry - and parking onsite - although walking & cycling are of course encouraged!

And finally - **ECOLUG** at the **Portwell Angel** - enjoying local organic wines, local beers & local foods rounds off ECOWEEK 2010!

IF NOT US - THEN WHO? -- IF NOT NOW - THEN WHEN?

From the website www.ecoweek.info/

Faringdon Ecoweek began in 2006 and had grown to its present size offering a range of visits and



sprightly gentleman, he has taken on board all ideas of alternative energy with relish and has proved to Defra (from the days of MAFF) that nothing is impossible. He also told us of the twenty five year agreement that he signed two years ago with RSPB regarding the preservation of natural habitat on his land. A great believer, John is an ardent supporter of the Centre for Alternative Technology at Machynlleth. He still uses his first solar photovoltaic panel to recharge the batteries used for the electric fences around the farm. The farm is visited by children from schools around the area and our arrival coincided with the departure of one such group.



The farm currently boasts a large bank of photovoltaic panels that give a healthy return with power being fed straight into the grid. This has supposedly reached the end of its estimated lifetime of fifteen years and is still going strong. The present array is about to be dwarfed by another two banks of the same size and promising a life of at least twenty years. Not only has the first bank of panels paid for itself, being partly funded by Defra, but the amount received per KW unit has risen from 6p to 36p in its lifetime.

LOCAL WIND FARM

We also heard about the great success of the local Wind Farm at Westmill. Five turbines were installed here, the total cost of the project being £8m, with the cost of the turbines themselves being £2m. A great deal of effort went into obtaining planning permission and a change in regulation regarding turbine safety assisted in

getting the application through. Of the 2,300 investors in the project, only 7 of these are local people. However with a turnover of £1m the investment is proving well worthwhile. Seimen's are contracted to maintain the turbines at a 95% efficiency rate. The power generated is sold into the national grid, considered to be more efficient and financially better than relying on direct local usage. 0.5% of the profit from the turbines has to be used for education and 750 schoolchildren will benefit from activities within Eco week, enjoying workshops at the Wind Farm.

After tea and home-made cakes, members enjoyed the stroll around the farm buildings and nearby meadows, inspecting some of the items installed by John and learned for themselves how hot solar heated water from an old radiator can be! We also inspected his museum of artefacts and the great barn, now used for celebratory events.



Instead of the intended speech by Keith Taylor, MEP, who had been detained in Brussels, visitors were treated to a forum of local speakers who shared their thoughts with us on the benefits to the local area of initiatives in the environmental field. The evening ended with a buffet supper and a pleasant journey home.

INFO BOX

www.ecoweek.info/ Faringdon Ecoweek

www.glosmtf.org.uk GMTF

www.towns.org.uk Action for Market Towns

