

I am chair of Sustainable Witney, one of 7 Community Action Groups in West Oxfordshire, who organise events, support campaigns and promote reduction of food, fabric, heat and goods waste through running swap shops, Refashion, carrying out thermal imaging for WODC, and recently setting up an initiative called Dinnertime in Witney with Tower Hill School and the Methodist Church, helping to tackle food poverty issues. We also run a yearly course called Carbon Conversations to give information about how to measure then reduce household and personal carbon footprints in a non-judgemental setting. The other 6 groups in the area run similar events and campaigns each year.

We are manned entirely by volunteers and are supported by the CAG Project Oxfordshire, which is currently under threat of having its funding reduced then removed.

I would like to tell you what we have gained and what we would lose if this were to happen.

Since we have had the support of the project we have grown from a group who ran a couple of swap shops to what we now offer. Over the past year, in West Oxfordshire:-

- 10 tonnes of waste was prevented and stopped from entering landfill.
- Over 6 tonnes of carbon emissions have been avoided. This was measured using the modelling tool which won the award for innovation at the OCVA awards last week. This is managed entirely by the project staff and is a great way of measuring the impact of the groups in the network, it is not something the volunteers would find easy to manage.
- The consumer cost saving has been £19,505.25 – a combination of volunteer hours, over 800 of them, which equates to almost 6 months of a full time job and the savings made to consumers getting goods for free instead of them buying them. This is also measured using the modelling tool, more information about this can be got from the project.  
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The project supports us by:-

- Enabling the CAGs around the county to network and help each other by sharing resources, volunteers and information
- Sorting out training opportunities such as how to manage finances, risk assessments, managing volunteers etc.
- Supporting groups in developing funding applications.
- Providing support when setting up new initiatives
- Promoting through the Key newsletter, website and media the events that we run.
- Sorting out liability insurance for all the CAGs and ensuring that all appropriate legislation is conformed to.

Whilst we understand that money can't be found from thin air and that there are other projects and services under threat, we believe that cutting the project funding would be a serious backward step in how we mobilise communities on climate change. Not only that, we have proved using the Community Impact Modelling Tool, that as a network, in the last financial year alone we created over £800,000 of financial benefit to the county, which at a current cost of £92,000 for the CAG Project, gives the local authority an 8:1 return without even looking at wider carbon reduction and the more intangible benefits such as stronger and more resilient communities. Furthermore, if the funding is fully withdrawn in 2018, it is likely that the number of active groups will significantly decrease if only due to the fact that individual groups are unlikely to be able to afford individual insurance cover and there won't be a governing body to assume responsibility / liability for insurance issues.

As Cllr Nimmo-Smith (OCC Portfolio Holder for the Environment) has pointed out, there are other groups doing the 'green agenda' in Oxfordshire but the majority of them rely on the support of the CAG Project. The Project, however, is not just about environmental issues, but is also working in deprived communities on social issues such as food and fuel poverty. For example, CAG act as a feeder into organisations such as the Low Carbon Hub, helping community groups develop to a point where they have the capacity and confidence to run energy projects. You can't have community energy without the communities to do it. We believe we are also now helping to fill the gap left by the dissolution of the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership, working very closely with District Council officers on promoting the waste hierarchy to residents. To put it into context, £92,000 represents the equivalent of around 39 promotional adverts in bus shelters a year (ref: Outdoor Media Centre), compared to over 1,000 CAG events, directly reaching over 65,000 residents in their own communities. We think it's easy to work out which is likely to have the biggest overall impact.

### **District Council contributions**

To split the current cost of the CAG Project equally between all the DCs and OCC, would mean an annual contribution of around £15k each. However, if the DCs looked to purely fill the gap left by OCC's proposals then it would look like the breakdown in front of you.

2015 – 2016	£4.5k per DC	(£70k from OCC)
2016 – 2017	£8.4k per DC	(£50k from OCC)
2017 – 2018	£14.4k per DC	(£20k from OCC)
2018 onwards	£15.3k per DC and OCC	