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In September of this year Oxford City Council hosted the country’s first Citizens Assembly on the subject of climate change. The topic for discussion is Oxford’s contribution to the UK reducing its net carbon emissions to zero by 2050, as signed into law by the national government in June. This is encouraging, but we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that getting to zero is only half the puzzle. If we wish to take seriously the commitment to keep global temperatures within 1.5 °C of pre-industrial levels, the other half of the problem is reaching zero before CO2 emissions cause the global temperature to reach this level.

The most straightforward way to think about this issue is to put it in terms of a “carbon budget,” that is, the amount of CO2 that can be emitted globally between now and 2050 while still keeping the rise in global temperature below 1.5 °C.

The raw numbers present a daunting scenario; Oxfordshire currently emits around 3.7 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year. In other words, by the end of 2019 we will already have spent one-ninth of our 31-year allowance.

However, it is important to note that Oxfordshire is already ahead of the curve nationally in terms of reducing its emissions; between 2013 and 2015 (the most recent year for which definitive figures are available) Oxfordshire’s emissions fell 15%, thanks largely to reduced carbon costs involved in generating electricity. The national average during this period was just above 7%.

An example of this principle in action is a pilot scheme organised by Low Carbon East Oxford in 2012, dubbed the Landlord Energy Saving Scheme (LESS). Under the Energy Act 2011, properties must meet a certain minimum energy efficiency standard in order to be rented out (the standard is set to gradually rise over the next decade), with Oxford being particularly affected due to its high prevalence of rented accommodation (due to both high housing prices and the presence of the university). The scheme therefore aimed to train energy assessors to provide advice on measures that could be taken to improve the energy efficiency of specific properties, ranging from energy-efficient electrical devices and lighting to the installation of solar panels.

There are number of other charities in Oxfordshire trying try to address issues around conservation, climate change and sustainable living. They range from Earth Trust in Abingdon whose mission is to work with volunteers to better manage and understand what we can do to care for the planet.

Oxford hub have a whole range of environmental volunteering opportunities, supported by the Department of Environmental Sustainability at the University of Oxford. Similarly, Oxford Friends of the Earth mission is to promote a healthy and sustainable environment by encouraging people across Oxfordshire to be active in driving meaningful, positive change that makes a lasting difference on our environment. Lastly TOE (Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment) raises funds for environmental projects that benefit the people and wildlife of our county

Public engagement in making a difference at the community level has always been the core of Oxfordshire's civil society. Meeting the climate challenge will mean tapping into this same willingness to effect change that is locally driven but globally vital.

This feature was developed in partnership with the Volunteer Centre at OCVA and Christopher Peacocks article. If you would like a feature about a particular issue or theme or about your **community group, charity or social enterprise** in the Voluntary Voice section of the Oxford Times please email: vol@ocva.org.uk