

Sandy Graham
SOME GREEN THOUGHTS

I believe that Highgate is hardly green at all. This is sad in view of above average level of education and presumably knowledge and awareness of what is happening to our planet. I find people are keen to seize on views to the effect that recycling is a waste of time, global warming is a myth and so on. I am even told that my electric car uses such a lot of electricity I would cause less pollution in a 4 wheel drive. No, it doesn't and it doesn't guzzle up the world's remaining hydro-carbons

My own carbon footprint is not very impressive and I'm not claiming any high moral ground in this matter. Like many, I guess I select a small response that suits me, but I've changed my ways, am still changing and I don't do nothing.

Electric cars. We bought a G Wizz (made by GoinGreen) in March 2005. Before that, like many other couples we had 2 cars, a bigger and a smaller one. The G Wizz replaced the small car which was used more as the London runaround. We have an account at the local petrol station and so know what we spend on fuel. This cost has plummeted as we now have a tankful something like once a month. You would need to park off the road to recharge the battery – a flat dweller could do this with access to a power point in a garage or beside a brick wall. When we bought the car a government grant of £1000 brought the cost down to £6000. Unfortunately, this grant is no longer available. Electricity to run the car probably costs us £30 a year. The car has a range of 40 miles per charge on average, more in warm weather. Camden and Haringey offer no concessions to electric cars that I know of but Westminster is amazingly generous with a result that you will see lots of G Wizzes there. I can leave the car on a meter for 2 hours without paying and of course there's no London congestion charge to pay. We pay £200 a year for unlimited parking at a garage just north of Oxford Circus where they also have power points to charge the battery. Okay, we can't do much more than 30 mph but then, in London, how often is it possible or desirable? And climbing Highgate West Hill with a passenger, you move quite slowly. But while we lose in sheer speed the small size makes it easy to park in Central London, theatreland and the like. It is fun and we love it.

Houses. I was encouraged to find out more about solar panels by a couple on the Holly Lodge estate – Penelope and John Massey-Stewart - who installed one two years ago and who are enthusiastic about it. Does Highgate have any others, I'd love to know? Haringey have a fairly good booklet "Greening your home" which covers saving energy and water, heating, insulation and recycling. Haringey tell me there are two solar panels, both in North Hill. I cannot get information from Camden.

Recycling. I do not think much of Haringey's (my council) rubbish collecting. I have an enormous wheelie bin for "everything" and a small green box for recyclables, everything in together which I know is an inefficient and often useless way to recycle. Those who have lived in other European countries, particularly Scandinavia and Switzerland, will attest how strict recycling rules give most householders an output of unrecyclable rubbish of about a carrier bag each week – the rest is recycled. I have the impression Camden has a not bad record on this. There are websites galore for information – I will list some at the end.

Camden put up recycling containers a few years ago beside Waterlow Park and the Post Office but a letter from our Environment committee told them to move them away and they are now by St. Joseph's where many of us can reach them only with difficulty. So we now have no recycling containers in the centre of Highgate Village. The Environment Committee ought to remedy that.

How about a bottle bank at least in Pond Square? Judging by the amount of drinking that goes on in the area (and parties in 10a and the Institute are only part of this!) it would quickly fill.

Highgate's own Nicky Gavron leads on the Greater London Authority's climate change programme and their latest initiative is due out soon. As I write I have the GLA programme of February 2007. This has plenty of information on carbon emissions and their sources: domestic, commercial, aviation, other transport. While the array of scientific information over a dozen pages is impressive, it offers little to the private citizen keen to make a contribution. Of course greener methods and policies will happen whether individuals do anything or not – car engines have lower emissions and become more efficient, some new boilers run on almost half the gas of an old one, industries are increasingly forced to stop polluting air and water. But there is scope for further campaigns. I don't believe businesses recycle much, so households may send their paper off but does the average office? Do bars and restaurants send bottles to recycling? Our enthusiasm to be green will inevitably be mixed with self interest. To walk instead of using the car keeps you fitter and virtually everything I have mentioned saves money

Websites, www.goinggreen.co.uk
www.haringey.gov.uk
www.camden.gov.uk
www.solarforlondon.org