

SECTION 1: SETTING OFF

This section:

- * welcomes you to the toolkit
- * discusses how to use it
- * reflects on our corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community
- * provides tips for your sustainability group
- * suggests ways to support Friends through the change that is needed

1. SETTING OFF

Welcome to the Sustainability Toolkit

At Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG) in Canterbury in August 2011 Yearly Meeting made a corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. Our commitment calls on all Quakers to act personally, as meetings and corporately; to be accountable to one another; and to celebrate the changes that we are able to make.

The aim of this toolkit is to support Quaker meetings on their journeys to becoming low-carbon, sustainable communities. Our commitment identifies meetings as having particular tasks in realising this vision: meetings are asked 'to consider how truth prospers with regard to sustainability, taking care to relate this to all our testimonies – peace, truth, simplicity, equality and care for the environment' and 'to practise speaking truth to power at a local level'.

This may seem like a daunting task. It may well bring up lots of questions. This toolkit is designed to help meetings explore these and to support you in your witness to what the commitment means for your particular communities.

In the toolkit we identify what we understand to be the different stages in the journey of change that Yearly Meeting has begun. We provide resources to help your meeting take its next step on this journey.

In our experience a healthy approach to change engages our heads, our hearts and our hands. The toolkit therefore contains a range of material – including learning resources, reflections, practical action, group activities and Friends' stories – appealing to each of these. We also know that all three are intimately connected: 'Growing in the spirit is a consequence of taking action, and action flows from our spiritual growth; here is the connectedness we seek'.

This toolkit draws on the expertise and experience of Living Witness and Quaker Peace & Social Witness in supporting Friends to take action on sustainability. It relies particularly on resources created and used by Living Witness. It also contains many stories from Friends who are taking action on sustainability. Many more were contributed and all are now online at www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability-stories.

We hope you find the toolkit useful. Please send us your feedback using the details on the inside front cover.

 For a full copy of Minute 36 from YMG 2011 go to page 89.

“The action we are ready to take at this time is to make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community.”

*Yearly Meeting Gathering 2011,
Minute 36*



Friends at Yearly Meeting Gathering, 2011. Photo: ©Mike Pinches 2011

Using the Sustainability Toolkit

We've divided the toolkit into sections. In our experience these represent a useful way of understanding the stages in a journey of change.

You may want to use the toolkit by moving through each section in the order in which they appear. But your journey won't always be smooth or linear, and some of its stages may coincide; it is likely to involve plenty of stopping and starting and jumping back and forth. So feel free to dip in and out of the toolkit, taking what you need, when you need it.

This is your toolkit, so use it in whatever way is most helpful to you. Share it, photocopy it, and add your own thoughts and creativity.



Who is the toolkit for?

We have written this toolkit primarily for local meetings. However, much of its contents should be helpful to area meetings and area meeting trustees and others concerned about sustainability in meetings and the use of property.



Friends of Cotteridge Meeting stand in front of their new solar array. Photo: Harriet Martin

Getting support

This is a 'do-it-yourself' toolkit; however, there is plenty of support available should you want it. See the Further resources section on page 78. You can contact Living Witness and QPSW for support at any time. See the front of the toolkit for contact details.



A shared meal at the Quaker Community, Bamford. Photo: Living Witness/Quaker Voluntary Action



Sharing your stories and experiences

- * Read the sustainability stories at www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability-stories. Email your own story to sunnivat@quaker.org.uk
- * Sign up to the earthQuaker newsletter at www.livingwitness.org.uk
- * Sign up to the Sustainability...for Peace newsletter and e-updates at www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability
- * Share and discuss on the Quakernomics blog at www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics
- * Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SustainableQuakers
- * Engage with your area meeting, Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting
- * Come to a Living Witness Link Group meeting or QPSW conference



The meditation pond at Pales Meeting House. Photo: Martin Williams

Look out for the following symbols:

-  This means that there are resources listed in the Additional support and resources section to support you.
-  This indicates that there is a group exercise for you to use.

Reflection: Becoming a low-carbon, sustainable community

At its gathering in Canterbury in summer 2011, Britain Yearly Meeting made 'a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community'. This act of faith by the gathering was also a call to faith for Quakers and local meetings in Britain.

In the context of unpredictable global change, we cannot know at present exactly what will be required of us. However, as the Yearly Meeting minute says: 'Our actions have as yet been insufficient... We need to arrive at a place in which we all take personal responsibility to make whatever changes we are called to... We need to allocate adequate resources' and the process 'needs to be joyful and spirit-led' and 'to flow from nowhere but love'.

But what is a low-carbon, sustainable community? How low is low? How much should we be focusing on carbon? What does 'sustainable' mean? And what kind of community can we be – should we be – as a yearly meeting? These are all questions that Friends have been wrestling with, in particular over the last ten years in the regular Living Witness Link Group gatherings. None of them has a simple answer and we find that they need exploring and re-exploring in our local meetings.

What would be a Quaker approach to sustainability?

A Quaker approach to sustainability must start in worship, asking together how we are led. Here we can ask, 'what does love require?', 'what difficult truths are we called to face?' and 'what is God's will in all this?'.

Our response may arise from love and a sense of the sanctity of all life – a call to answer that of God in every being, every rock, stream, dung heap. It must also be grounded in Truth, especially being willing to see where we are doing harm, where we are part of a system of harm. And we must find the way to hold to that truth while also being compassionate to ourselves and others.

We may also respond out of a concern for humanity, for current and future generations and for society as a whole. To be sustainable, our society must enable individuals, communities and the natural world to flourish. It will be unstable if it fails to care for the well-being of every individual, or for community cohesion, or for the ecosystems on which it depends. The Quaker testimonies of equality and peace are witness to our vision of a world grounded in love and in answering that of God in each other. They call for a transformation in the economic system as well as in the systems of government and justice.



Young Friends and the Big Top, YMG 2011.

Photo: ©Mike Pinches 2011

“The process of coming to terms with the impact of intensified human activity on the natural world has enabled my spiritual sense to deepen and widen.”

Jonathan Dale, Central Manchester Local Quaker Meeting

1. SETTING OFF

Ultimately, sustainability means finding our joy, our life, fulfilment of our deepest needs, in ways that cause no harm and that enrich the world. Friends' witness has been that happiness has little to do with material consumption. The worshipping community lies at the centre of the Quaker way – sharing our journey, our search for meaning, walking with others and pausing in companionship with them.

Why the focus on carbon?

Humanity is degrading natural systems and habitats in many ways. Some of the biggest challenges to sustainability result from a few areas of increasing human activity and consumption:

- 1) demand for energy for transport, heating and cooling, information technology and manufacturing; these depend mainly on diminishing fossil fuel reserves and result in carbon emissions which cause climate change
- 2) demand for food, especially meat and dairy products, contributing to climate change and taking up a growing proportion of the world's land surface and fresh water
- 3) use of materials (especially timber, cement, metals and plastics) and land to construct buildings and roads.

There are many more issues – toxic pollution from industry and agriculture, nuclear waste, overfishing. However, it makes sense to single out climate change because it has causes in common with many other environmental challenges. It also compounds their effects, especially in destroying natural habitats and biodiversity. Climate change is the single environmental problem that is most likely to cause famine, mass migration and conflict for humans and mass extinction for other species in the coming decades.

How low is low?

We don't really know how fast we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to prevent catastrophic climate change. Uncertainty can be a cause for inaction but given the scale of potential consequences we should be doing whatever we can to prevent them. The UK government has committed to an 80% emission cut by 2050. The European Council has said that an 80–95% cut is needed by then in industrialised countries. The implication is that we should be reducing emissions by between 4 and 8% every year. So far there is no sign of government policies or public action that would bring about this pace of change. However, some individual Friends have already developed lifestyles with personal greenhouse gas emissions 60–70% below the national average.

*... sustainability means
finding our joy, our life ...
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Photo: Alick Beale

1. SETTING OFF

Making such personal changes can bring great satisfaction, and also gives us credibility in working for change in our local communities and advocating more ambitious government policies.

And what kind of community do we really need?

Community matters for several reasons. Our experience is that being part of a group plays a key part in sustaining a different way of life. People's consumption choices are shaped by those of their family, friends and colleagues. We need the support of friends who share our values and priorities and with whom we can develop a different set of lifestyle norms. Community and relationship also lie at the centre of healthy human life, and our hope and faith in a sustainable future.

Many groups have recognised the importance of community for sustainability. It is at the heart of the Transition movement and has also been a focus for government policy. But community initiatives often get mired in conflict over goals, strategies and ways of being and working.

To be sustainable a community must enable its individual members to flourish – otherwise they try to change it or to leave. The traditional Quaker testimonies to truth, equality, peace and simplicity are part of our witness to a form of community that is good for its members and is also able to build positive links to other communities.

Advices & queries captures much of the Quaker understanding of what makes a healthy community – for instance, number 17:

'Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? ... When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you ... Think it possible that you may be mistaken.'

At its best, Quaker community is grounded in deep listening, respecting and valuing difference, and being willing to let go of our own positions and find a way forward in unity. This is the kind of community we need to build in our local and area meetings, in the Yearly Meeting and also with others beyond Quakerism. Perhaps this is where Quakers have a particular gift to offer the world.



On a Quaker Voluntary Action working retreat.

Photo: Jasmine Piercy.

“Our Quaker community was strengthened, energised and cheered time and again.”

Harriet Martin, Cotteridge Quaker Meeting

1. SETTING OFF

Some questions you might explore, perhaps with others in your meeting in a worship-sharing or discussion session:

- * How do Quaker values connect to your vision for a sustainable society? What other values are important to you and how do you express them in your life?
- * What might 'low-carbon' mean in practice for you individually? And for your meeting?
- * How can you build a stronger and more supportive community in your meeting? What about your workplace or other groups you are involved in?

*Listen patiently and seek
the truth which other
people's opinions may
contain for you ...*



YMG 2011. Photo: ©Mike Pinches 2011

Acting as a group

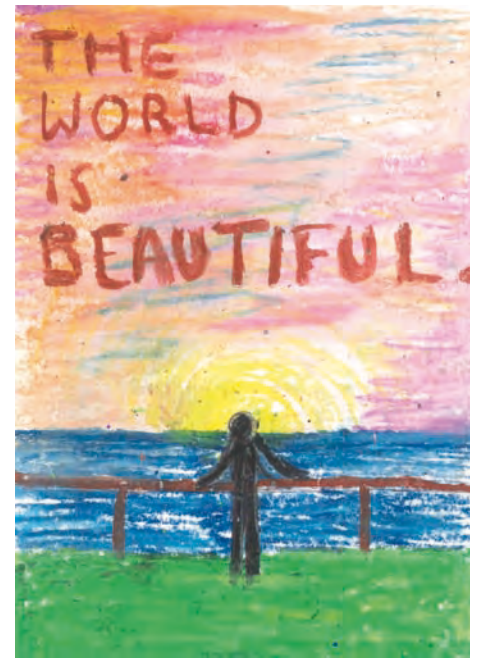
Our worshipping communities are our vehicle for the journey towards becoming a low-carbon, sustainable community. Most meetings taking action on sustainability have at least started by setting up a sustainability group, or similar, though you may find your group becomes the whole meeting.

Some tips for your sustainability group:

- * Get to know and be known by Friends in your meeting. This probably means listening as well as talking and taking time to participate in the spiritual, social and business life of the meeting.
- * Be comfortable with the fact that some people will leave the group and others will join but that whoever turns up are the right people.
- * Think about *how* you run your meetings. How often will you meet, for how long, and over what period? Try to share out the facilitation. You may find the following useful:
 - 🔍 Guidelines for facilitators (page 76), particularly if your group is doing any of the
 - 👥 group exercises (see Section 6).
- * You may want to create together some simple, clear written aims, for example to raise awareness and take action on sustainability in your meeting. You don't need to spend too long on these (they're just a starting point) but it may be helpful to have something to refer back to.
- * Depending on how many people there are in your group you may want to establish sub-groups to focus on particular themes and activities. Groups could be tasked with investigating and feeding back on a particular area for potential action. Similarly, different groups could be responsible for different areas of action.
- * You could bring the concern to your local business meeting. The timing and usefulness will depend on your meeting and your relationship with it.
- * Be patient and ask for help. A group will benefit from the reassurance, support, stimulation and resources available in a wider network. You may want to join Living Witness, or explore what other green groups there are locally.
- * Accept and expect that your meeting may find it difficult to come to a decision on these issues. Threshing meetings are a good way to share different opinions openly. See *Quaker faith & practice* 12.26.

“I have made better progress in acting with others than going it alone.”

Martin Smith, Wooldale Quaker Meeting



A drawing by a young Friend, YMG 2011.



1. SETTING OFF

- * Think about engaging others outside of your meeting in your activities. We know that some meetings feel too small to do things on their own. For many, action on sustainability has been a good way to engage with others in the community.
- * Celebrate your achievements! Shared meals can be a good way to do this.

Supporting Friends

Our corporate commitment asks Friends 'to be tender with one another and to support one another through the grief and fear that radical change will provoke' (Minute 36, page 89). Engaging with sustainability is about personal transformation and emotional, mental and spiritual journeying. In our experience worship sharing and inner transition are as important as practical action.

Here are some suggestions for how you can support Friends:

-  Exercise 1 (Sowing the seeds of action, page 67) aims to help Friends explore how their values inform their actions.
-  Exercise 7 (Exploring your path, page 74) is designed to support Friends to identify the different paths they might want to take.

You could use the *Be the Change* study group sessions produced by Living Witness.

Go to www.livingwitness.org.uk/publications.html

Carbon Conversations: six meetings about low-carbon living outlined in a book and led by trained facilitators.

See www.cambridgecarbonfootprint.org

Ecocell: a toolkit established by Christian Ecology Link, designed to help you live a simpler, more Christian lifestyle.

See www.christian-ecology.org.uk/ecocell.htm

EcoTeams: you can join an existing team or start a new one.

Information at www.ecoteams.org.uk



Muswell Hill Quakers invite local dignitaries including local MP Lynn Featherstone to plant 100 trees to celebrate 100 years of their meeting.
Photo: Trish Carn



Young Friends in discussion, YMG 2011.
Photo: ©Mike Pinches 2011

Sharing

Some meetings have found it helpful to find ways for Friends to share what action they are taking on sustainability, including their successes and challenges. You could do this in a way that enables the information to be shared with others such as those renting your building. Ideas include:

- * Put up a sustainability notice board for pictures, posters and notices.
- * Create a 'green wall': invite Friends to use a notice board or similar as a place to stick up short notes about action they are taking on sustainability. Establish the life of the board (months rather than weeks) and then when it is over discuss what was shared.
- * Consider having a 'green action' or 'green tips' section in your newsletter. Perhaps you could even get one in a community newsletter.
- * Make a 'pledge tree': invite Friends to use a notice board, or better still a tree-shaped board, to make sustainability-related pledges. If you are feeling creative make leaf shapes for Friends to write their pledges on. These and the board could be decorated as part of an activity for children and young Friends.

“My story shows that significant change is possible and making it is a journey towards well-being – not a path to hardship. It’s been exciting and involves learning new skills.”

Martin Smith, Wooldale Quaker Meeting



*The pledge tree created by staff in Friends House, London.
Photo: ©Colin Edwards, 2011*

Sustainability story

'Our advice is to start a group'



Calf Cop Meeting's Sustainability Witness and Action Group has begun to consider what responsible stewardship of the Meeting's land and buildings means in the light of sustainability. Photos: Jamie-Rose Campbell

We started a sustainability group at Calf Cop Meeting in October 2010. We are charged by our Meeting to consider the issues and to report back in due course with our ideas for action.

So far we have shared some of our own responses to the issues, and how these connect for us with the Quaker testimonies. We have begun to make links with others in the local community working for sustainable solutions. We have also begun to consider what responsible stewardship of our Meeting's land and buildings might mean in the light of sustainability.

We feel clear that working on practical projects of direct value both to members of the Meeting and to the local community is a natural way to live out and share our values: spiritual and practical, outreach and testimony, all at once. We hope in this way both to inspire others and to be inspired by them in a shared response to the urgent need to change how we live.

We hope to initiate further projects to reduce our carbon impact, while also building closer links with neighbours and friends. Early ideas for projects include composting toilets for the Meeting House allotments, and planting trees to frame and preserve the site of an earlier Meeting House on the land.

The next step for us will be to share our ideas with the Local Meeting as a whole, and with the Trustees of our land and buildings, and to reach agreement together about what developments are right for us as a Meeting. We know, for example, that others in the Meeting may yet need to be convinced that climate change is real, urgent, and something which Quakers should concern ourselves with!

It is early days for us as a Meeting, but in our sustainability group we already feel a renewed energy and pleasure in starting to make changes together. Our advice is to start a group, and to start to make changes, however small. Share the process as well as the outcomes, the feelings as well as the ideas. The problems we face are global and the scale can be scary, but there is a lot of joy in responding locally and starting where we are.

*Contributed by Mary Swale,
Calf Cop Meeting Sustainability Witness and Action Group (SWAG)*