

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

We all try to recycle plastic packaging wherever we can (I hope!). But what happens to it once we've put it in the bin? That was the question Malcolm Kimber aimed to answer at our February meeting. The UK generates more plastic waste per head than almost any other nation (5.2 million tons in 2018). Most of this is incinerated or sent to landfill, with around 20% exported to countries like Turkey, who promise to dispose of it safely. Unfortunately, according to Greenpeace, this just doesn't happen – most of it is burnt at low temperatures, releasing toxic fumes into the atmosphere, or simply dumped by the roadside.

An obvious answer – don't produce so much of the stuff! We can all help here, by putting pressure on supermarkets to get rid of unnecessary packaging, and using refillable containers when we go shopping. There are already several shops in Grange, Ulverston and Kendal only too happy to fill reusable containers for us. Let's support them! Thanks, Malcolm, for leading a stimulating discussion.

Waste came up again at our March meeting. Ann McGarry, until recently Education Officer at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) in mid-Wales, presented CAT's recently-published Zero Carbon Strategy for Britain via Zoom. The strategy document's main message is that zero carbon is perfectly achievable with current technology, using a combination of reduced consumption and sustainable energy generation. Ways of achieving the former include better insulation of our homes, a switch in our diets away from meat towards fruit, vegetables and pulses, more use of cycling and public transport – and producing less waste. Ways of achieving the latter include expanding wind, wave and tidal power and phasing out oil and gas completely.

None of this is new, but it was good to hear a well-argued strategy backed up by detailed facts and figures. The \$64,000 question, though, remains – do people in Britain have the will to make the necessary changes to their lifestyle to achieve zero carbon? Only time will tell.

Our April meeting took a different format, with three presenters talking about their experiences of "green" technology. First up was Sioelan Tjoa, explaining how an e-bicycle had changed her life. Despite growing up in Holland, where everyone cycles, she stopped cycling on moving to England, because of the lack of cycle tracks and Grange's notorious hills. But since she's bought an e-bike she's gone back to cycling in a big way. She no longer drives from her home in Allithwaite into Grange, using her e-bike instead come rain or shine. Quite apart from saving CO₂, she avoids parking problems and feels much fitter.

Next up was Annette Hennessy, describing how she had an elderly oil-fired heating system replaced with an air-source heat pump. The process inevitably caused some disruption, as it involved taking out an Aga stove and replacing all the old radiators, as well as installing a heat pump. But in fact she was pleasantly surprised how smoothly the job went, and she's really pleased with the results. Her house now feels warmer and more comfortable, as the low-temperature radiators give out heat all the time the system is running, rather than in short bursts like conventional radiators.

Roger Handley concluded proceedings by describing the Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recovery (MVHR) system he's fitted to his house. What is MVHR? It's basically a system of ducting, that continually draws fresh air from outside, recovering waste heat from stale air extracted from the house. Its advantages include fresher air, less condensation and reduced heat loss. It's most easily fitted to new-build housing, though retrofitting (especially in a bungalow) is perfectly feasible. Roger doesn't have any detailed figures on cost savings, but others have claimed anything up to a quarter off their heating bills

Thanks to all our three presenters for an interesting and down-to-earth session. It gave us all something to think about. *John Eakins*