

Northamptonshire ACRE

Bulk Oil Buying Project

Information for co-ordinators of local oil purchasing syndicates



All surplus from Northamptonshire ACRE's Bulk Oil Buying Project will go directly to supporting the work of Northamptonshire ACRE. Our mission statement is to work with Northamptonshire's rural communities to improve the quality of life, especially for the disadvantaged; to help them to help themselves, to value diversity and work to create a vibrant and sustainable future.

What's the scheme about?

The Northamptonshire community buying scheme is designed to help purchasers of central heating oil to make savings by buying in bulk. By operating county-wide, the scheme makes it possible for new or existing local community oil-buying groups to make the most of their collective purchasing power.



Who is behind it?

Northamptonshire ACRE - a long established local charity that works to support community-based action across the county (such as community-led planning, climate change, village halls, community-run shops and transport), is running the scheme.

Part of the income from the buying scheme will directly help to support the core activities of the charity.



How does it work?

Householders pay an annual fee of £20 (£30 for community organisations, £100 for businesses) to join the scheme. We negotiate with the various oil companies that supply premises in Northamptonshire and get the best price.

Once a month, local community-based co-ordinators are asked to let us know which members in their area want to order oil and how much they want. Once we have negotiated the price, we tell the co-ordinator when the delivery will be and how much the oil will cost. Because we are buying for large numbers of customers, we can negotiate hard on the members' behalf.

Members can order as often (or as seldom) as they want. And unless you are only using a tiny amount of oil, we are confident that the annual membership fee will be considerably less than the savings you make.

The scheme is very community-based and we are looking for local co-ordinators willing to put in an hour or two each month to help get the scheme off the ground in their village and keep it ticking over.

What does a local co-ordinator have to do?

To start with ~ the local co-ordinator will use whatever means suits them to tell people in their community about the scheme – this may be by email, face to face, or with leaflets through the door. Experience suggests that the 'village grape-vine' is very effective once word gets out! People join the scheme by paying an annual membership fee directly to Northamptonshire ACRE.



Once the scheme is operating (which will be as soon as there are any members in your local area) ~ the co-ordinator's job involves only 3 simple steps:-

1. Each month, ask your local members if they want to order heating oil and how many litres they will want. You will have the list of members in your community so you will know exactly who to contact.

You may be able to do a lot by email, but you will also need to cater for those who don't use it, so we also provide you with an order form that you can leave in a convenient place that you think is right for your community – it could be the village hall, shop, parish council meeting room. It's up to you.

2. Contact Northamptonshire ACRE by an agreed monthly deadline to tell them how many people want to order and how much oil they want. We would normally expect this to be done electronically and provide a simple order form.
3. Northamptonshire ACRE will tell you roughly when the deliveries will be made that month, by which supplier and at what price. You will pass that information on to the people who are ordering oil and the oil supplier will contact them directly to tell them exactly when to expect their delivery.

Next month you do it again!



What does a co-ordinator NOT have to do?

- ◆ Negotiate prices with oil suppliers
- ◆ Handle any money, either for membership or oil purchases
- ◆ Maintain membership records
- ◆ Get involved in problems between oil supplier and customer

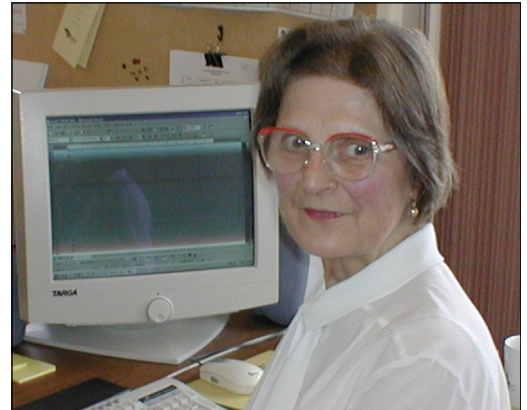
What kind of person will make a good local co-ordinator?

No special skills are needed but you must be

- ◆ reliable
- ◆ well organised
- ◆ have access to internet/home computer

and even better....

- ◆ interested in carbon reduction
- ◆ be part of/known in the local community



What's in it for me?



The local co-ordinator will get **free** membership of the scheme – so you will have the advantage of savings on your oil purchases without any up-front cost. We hope that you will also find it rewarding to be doing something useful in your local community and to be helping towards reducing your village's carbon footprint.

And we hope you might enjoy doing it!

What if things go wrong?

Well, first of all, we hope it won't. The system is very straightforward so the risk of problems is low. But the local co-ordinators are the key – you need to be accurate and reliable in passing information between your members and Northamptonshire ACRE

We will do all we can to prevent any mishaps, and will take any problems very seriously. We have a complaints policy in place, so you can be sure we are committed to getting this right. If it isn't, we need members to let us know so we can put it right and avoid it happening again.

Surely it's not very environmentally friendly...

The tankers that deliver heating oil may only do about 8 miles to the gallon when they are full. If oil delivery routes are more rational – and a tanker can offload all its oil in just a small geographical area – it is saving a lot of 'oil miles'. Our aim is to get oil deliveries across the whole of the county organised in a much more streamlined way and to minimise the carbon footprint of what is, inevitably, a fuel-guzzling business.

But we certainly aren't aiming to encourage people to buy **more** oil than they were before! We are deeply committed to sustainability and we want to encourage others to think about renewable energy. If we can help people save on oil, we can also help them save on solar panels!

Just one more thing...

Northamptonshire ACRE is used to working with volunteers and knows that sometimes people take things on that they can't continue. But other than in emergencies, we would like to ask local co-ordinators to commit to giving at least three months' notice if they want to stop doing it, and if possible, to recruit someone locally who will follow in their footsteps.

How do I volunteer?

Contact us by email: oil@northantsacre.org.uk or tel: **01604 765888**. Someone from Northamptonshire ACRE will get in touch with you, and we will do our best to answer any questions you may have.

This is what happens in one community

Judith, the co-ordinator for one local pilot scheme, explains how it works in her village ~

‘Out of about 160 users of oil in the village, 100 have joined the local buying scheme. Because people use oil at different rates and order in different quantities, the number of people who want to order in any one month varies – sometimes it can be as low as 10 sometimes as high as 70.

About 96% of the local members are on email so it’s easy to contact them; for the remaining four I put a paper order form in the village shop. Most months there are only 1-4 who use the paper system.

I pick the order form up on an agreed date, combine it with my electronic list and contact the Rural Community Council. Then I will get in touch with that month’s buyers to tell them the cost and the dates. It’s very straightforward, and only takes me an hour or so each month and benefits the community in many ways.’



About Northamptonshire ACRE



Northamptonshire ACRE

Our strategic aims are:

- To encourage and support community-led planning such as parish plans and rural community action
- To support the identification of rural needs, particularly for the disadvantaged
- To raise awareness of rural issues, lobby and influence policy
- To support the provision of affordable and accessible rural services
- To work in partnership with others, encouraging co-operation and influencing the allocation of resources
- To monitor our performance and provide value for money to our funders
- To encourage the development of staff and those working on behalf of the organisation

Find out more about who we are and what we do by visiting our website for news and events, publications, funding information and links to other useful organisations. If you would like to support the work of Northamptonshire ACRE, you can join our membership scheme.

Northamptonshire ACRE

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