

## Could you live a low carbon life? Meet the people who already are



*There are things we can all do to lower our impact on the environment. We speak to three people who have taken the first steps*

Donna Ferguson, *The Observer*

Some want a clear conscience. Others want to see if they are up to the challenge. But none of them want to wait until 2050 to cut their carbon emissions down to near-zero.

Across the country, environmentalists of all ages – from seven to 75 – are taking action now to lead low-carbon lives.

Last week, the government’s official advisory body, the Committee on Climate Change, recommended that the UK set a legally binding target to cut greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050.

The committee’s report acknowledged that cutting emissions to zero would be challenging and spell the end of petrol and diesel cars, as well as gas boilers. To achieve this target, people will have to fly less, waste less and eat less meat.

But many people are already living like this, and some are even doing so in eco “superhomes” – houses which have been

adapted to achieve a 60% or more reduction in carbon usage.

The *Observer* spoke to three residents to find out how they have adapted their homes and their lives to reduce carbon emissions.

### **Harriet Martin, 75, Bournville, Birmingham**

“My husband Chris and I are Quakers. Eleven years ago, we downsized to a semi-detached house in Bournville. To make our new home energy efficient, we insulated as much as we could – even under the floorboards. We installed double glazing and put solar panels on a pergola in the garden. In total, we’ve reduced our home’s carbon emissions by 85%. We open the house to show people what we’ve done.

Our diet is now 60% to 70% vegan, and the remainder vegetarian. We grow a lot of our fruit and vegetables on our allotment. We eat seasonally and I bake my own bread.

Even though we own a car, we rarely drive and try to walk as much as we can or take the bus. We avoid flying, preferring to travel by train.

We mend our clothes and furniture. When I feel I need to buy something, I try to get



it from a charity shop, borrow it from a neighbour or ask for it on Freecycle or Freegle, where people advertise things they want to get rid of. We bank with Triodos Bank. It costs us a few pounds each month, but it means we know our money will be used for ethical and sustainable purposes, not fossil fuel exploration or companies.

I feel guilty about what people of my generation have done. I don't want to leave behind a damaged world for my four grandchildren. But I think what really drove me to make changes was wanting to see just how sustainable we could make our lives now. It has been an enjoyable challenge, educating myself and adapting my lifestyle. It's fun."

**Zoë Williams, 42, Faringdon, Oxfordshire**

"I'm disabled and live with my parents Pat, 66, and John, 71, in a 1958 bungalow. We've done the obvious things like changing our boiler, adding insulation and installing solar panels but we've also taken some more unusual steps to lower our carbon emissions. For example, we've converted a chest freezer into a fridge, using a gadget that cuts the power once it reaches a certain temperature. The cold air doesn't fall out like it did with our previous front-opening fridge, so it uses half the electricity.

We charge our electric car with our solar panels and, on sunny days, we use a 'sun oven' to cook outside – it uses mirrors to concentrate the heat and it's a real joy, eating a meal or cake baked with just sunshine. We also use a method called haybox cooking to cook inside: bringing a soup to boil and then putting it

in an insulated box for an hour or two. It carries on cooking in its own heat, saving fuel.

The waste water from our sink drains into our toilet cistern, so we reuse the water the next time we flush the toilet.

All our vegetables are seasonal, grown either in our garden or on a local organic farm. My meals are 80% vegan, and 20% vegetarian. Vegan food is delicious – it's a cuisine.

I try to reuse and repair my belongings. I use the money I save to spend more on products I do buy. My clothes are either secondhand or organic. I

have a Fairphone – it's designed so that the individual parts can be easily replaced when they break. I don't buy wrapping paper, I reuse an old duvet cover I cut up into squares.

In total, we've reduced our home's carbon emissions by 93%. I've enjoyed making all these changes – they've been fun – and I feel part of a big movement. I want to be able to say to the next generation: I tried to prevent runaway climate change. If I didn't, I would feel I was committing a wrong."

**Jürgen Huber, 49, Shepherd's Bush, London**

"My wife and I have two kids: Anouk, 12 and Laurie, seven. We used to live on a boat. Ten years ago, we moved into a freezing cold 1920s terraced house in Shepherd's Bush. Straightaway, we started converting it – I did a lot of the work myself. I insulated it and added energy efficient windows, electric underfloor heating and an air-source heat pump.

I also installed solar panels and a battery bank. This provides most of the energy our family needs all year round. We increased our energy efficiency by nearly 70%. I reckon we must be saving £1,000 a year on our energy bills.

We buy organic food from Lidl, grow our own fruit using harvested rainwater and have cut down the amount of meat and dairy we eat, saving us about £60 a month. Our kids love vegetables and vegetarian meals, because they've always had them. Our favourite family meal is pea soup.

We all enjoy shopping in second-hand clothes shops and getting bargains for £2, but the children do shop at Primark too, and will sometimes eat at McDonald's and buy plastic toys or electric gadgets. We don't try to restrict them. We just try to recycle and repair, and promote a green lifestyle. They do get a bit fed up of me preaching about renewable energy, but at the same time, I know they feel very strongly about climate catastrophe.

I'm not just doing this for my kids and my community. I'm also doing it for myself. I want to be able to say, in the future: I have not taken part in the destruction of this planet. I can't make a massive difference alone. But I can help a little and that's what I'm doing. So when there are water shortages one day and floods the next, storms, heatwaves and bug infestations, when we are living in a horror movie in 10 or 20 years time, I will have a clear conscience."