

Is anyone in Shamley Green going to build a Tower?

The new Zero Carbon Guildford centre at the bottom of North Street in Guildford has been set up to help the Borough of Guildford reach carbon neutrality by 2030, through the development of a community-led climate action plan. According to ZCG only around 30% of Guildford's emissions can be directly tackled by the borough or county council, the remaining 60-70% must be addressed through strategies aimed at reducing consumption, better energy management, and waste reduction.

ZCG is a charity and is run entirely by volunteers. It hosts workshops, events and screenings and, amongst other things, it has several community circular economy schemes such as a 'library of things' and a 'baby clothes library'. ZCG also show cases examples of new ideas which aim to help the environment.

One idea is vertical farming which is the practice of growing food in vertical columns, using either vertical farming towers or shelving racks. This practice allows growers to use minimal land whilst conserving water and lowering energy consumption. Vertical growing offers a way to grow crops when space is limited - even allowing you to grow leafy greens and other delicious fruit and veg inside your own home. They have an example of a real working vertical tower at the new centre.

But what about an insect tower? Several companies are starting to make animal feed and fertiliser from insects using vertical farming techniques. One company in France called Ynsect is breeding mealworms, The larvae of these mealworms are then processed into protein-rich flour and oil to be used in animal feed. Mealworms are fed mostly bran but can also eat food waste products. Back on the ground in the UK one company called Better Origin has developed large units in which food waste is consumed by black soldier flies, which then provide nutrient rich food for animals.

It may sound a bit creepy but in each case the idea is to provide a protein rich crop which is an alternative to soya and fishmeal. This would help to reduce the amount of soya we import to feed our chickens and other animals. According to The Soil Association the UK's overseas soya footprint is 1.7 million hectares (roughly 3 million tonnes) mostly for animal feed, mostly for chickens. Less than 30% of these imports are certified sustainable which means they could be doing untold damage to habitats and species across the world.

The Soil Association UK is asking the government to act now to ensure that the production of poultry in the UK does not continue to increase year on year. We eat nearly a billion chickens each year - 95% are members of fast-growing breeds, intensively reared in indoor units. The Soil Association want 2022 to be the year of 'Peak Poultry'. In particular they want industrial chicken to be phased-out from school and hospital menus, and for new intensive poultry units to be banned. They are not suggesting we stop eating chicken just that the chicken we do eat should be better cared for and fed responsibly.

We all know that we must lower our red meat consumption in order to reduce our carbon footprints but it seems that switching to eating more soy fed, intensively farmed poultry is not the answer. Insects give off far fewer greenhouse gases than other livestock and if they also help to reduce food waste and limit deforestation maybe the idea is not so creepy after all. Anyway food for thought!

Happy new year

And do, If you get the chance, check out Zero Carbon Guildford in 2022 you may like some of their ideas.