

Community Owned District Heating System – thinking about whether this might work in Haydon Bridge?

Frequently Asked Questions (and some answers)

“Sounds great, but what on earth is a district heating scheme?”

The basic idea is that instead of everyone having their own boiler, there is a common heat source that generates hot water. This would then be piped around the village in highly insulated pipes, providing heat and hot water to homes and businesses via something called a “heat interface unit”, which is a bit like having a boiler in your house that runs on hot water.

We don't yet know what the best heat source would be to meet our needs, this is just an interesting idea at this stage. We would need expert advice on the best options.

“I've never heard of this; I don't want to be a guinea pig!”

District heating systems are actually much more common than you might realise, especially in Europe, and there are plenty large and small scale schemes in the UK, from a scheme in the middle of Gateshead which heats the Sage, Baltic and several other public buildings, to all the National Trust properties Wallington Hall. The whole of Copenhagen city is on one, and around 60% of all the heat in Denmark is delivered via district heating! This is a proven technology.

“What would all this cost?”

We don't know yet! However, one of the driving forces behind the idea is to reduce fuel bills and for the system to be community owned – so instead of all that money we spend on oil, coal and LPG every year going to big companies, we get to keep it in the community! There is a long way to go to define how this would work, how the capital would be funded, how income would be shared with the community, etc..., but in principle it should be great, and we feel it is really worth exploring in more detail.

“Would I have to join?”

We are at the very beginning of exploring the idea, but if even it proves feasible and there is enough interest in the community, it will be completely optional to join.

“Sounds disruptive”

There is no getting around the fact that pipes would have to be laid underground, but as a community, once we know more about the pros and cons of such a project, we will have to decide whether this short-term disruption will be worth the benefits of cheaper, low carbon heat for the coming decades.

“What happens if it goes off”

Irrespective of the source (or sources) of heating, district heating schemes of this size are always designed to ensure there is back-up and resilience in the event of breakdown or routine maintenance. This means you are significantly less likely to end up without heat and hot water than if you have your own, stand-alone heating system.

“Can I still control my own heating?”

Absolutely! In most cases, you will control your heating with exactly the same controls as you do now. You will have complete control over the temperature of your home.

“If I turn my heating right up does that mean someone else won’t get any?”

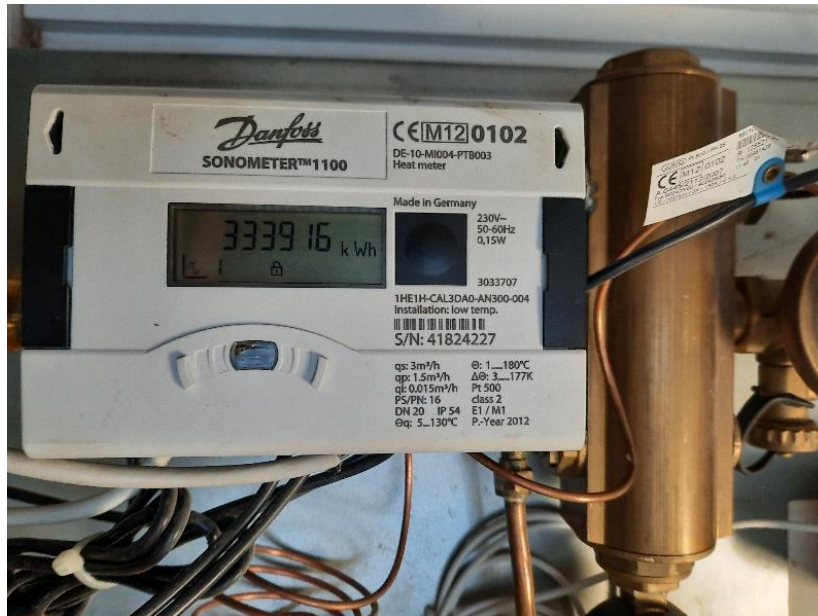
No. The heat network will be designed to ensure it can cope with fluctuations in heat demand.

“What about hot water, how does that work?”

Hot water is available ‘on demand’. If you turned on your tap or shower, you will get instant hot water. There is no limit to the number of baths or showers - you won’t run out of hot water.

“How would I be charged for the heat I use?”

You will have a heat meter like the one in the image below. This records how much heat you are using, and you will be charged an agreed price for each unit of heat. One of the benefits of this is that you are paying only for the heat you use - every kWh counted is the useful heat delivered to your property.



“How does the heat get into my house?”

A Heat Interface Unit (HIU) transfers the heat from the insulated heat network pipes into your home’s heating system. A HIU can typically fit inside a kitchen cupboard or in the place of an existing boiler. It is a similar size, but often smaller, than a gas boiler. The picture below is in a cupboard in a utility room. Often, they have a casing on them to hide them from view.



“Does this mean I get rid of my oil tank?”

Yes! You can finally get rid of your oil tank and regain some space in your garden!

“I don’t have a wet central heating system, could I join the network?”

If you don’t currently have a ‘wet heating system’, that is radiators or underfloor heating that have hot water in them, then one would need to be installed if you would like to join the network.

More questions?

Please send them to philhartley41@yahoo.co.uk and we will find out the answers and add them to the FAQs.