



Community Oil Buying Scheme

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is it changing?

Northamptonshire ACRE (NACRE) is a charity and it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure funding to maintain the work that we do. Currently NACRE supports the oil buying scheme by picking up the expenses that are not covered by the annual membership fees, particularly on the administration side. From 1st August 2016 it will not be possible for NACRE to continue to support the project in this way. It is therefore essential that the scheme is as efficient as possible and able to generate enough income to be sustainable as an independent project.

The current system is very time consuming to administer and also open to occasional errors. The plan is to introduce a system where members manage their own information and orders. The project officer can then spend more time marketing the scheme to increase the membership. More members = more oil ordered = ability to negotiate a better price = everyone wins.

2. Who will I be dealing with?

NACRE has been working with some clever people at eSmartMetrics, who have developed some fantastic technology to help us run our oil buying scheme more efficiently. Operating as **olive**, in conjunction with NACRE, they manage a secure website to allow you to take control of your details and your orders. You will be ordering oil and making payment through the **olive** system. NACRE will still be responsible for the administration of the oil buying scheme so you can contact the Project Officer by email at oil@northantsacre.org.uk or telephone 01604 765888.

3. Who/what is 'olive'?

olive is a service from local company eSmartMetrics Limited. **olive** is working with NACRE to improve the efficiencies of its oil buying scheme and has developed an online system for members of the Northamptonshire Community Oil Buying Scheme.

4. How will the new scheme work?

All you need to do is register on the new website by entering your name, address, phone number(s), email address, comments about your tank location or access requirements and create a password. If you forget your password, just click on the button to reset your password and a temporary password will be emailed to you instantly. You will then need to go into your Account details to reset yourself a new password for future use. Please keep a note of this in a safe place. If you use more than one email address, make sure you use the email address that you put in when you first registered with the website.

5. Once I've registered, how do I order oil?

Once you have an account you can log in at any time to order oil. Simply select the product you require (Kerosene 28, with or without additive) and add any notes that may be relevant to that order e.g. if you are going to be away, changes to access etc. Oil order deadlines will continue to be once a month. You will need to register card payment details either at registration or prior to making your first order. When you place an order you will need to be as accurate as possible with your order quantity as you will only be able to order a set number of litres (minimum order quantity 500 litres) and you will need to pay for this oil **before** it is delivered. See the point 20 below for more details.



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6. What if I don't have access to the internet?

Currently a small percentage of NACRE members do not have access to the internet for one reason or another. If you are not able to use the new web based system yourself please continue to liaise with the Project Officer, who will be only too pleased to accept orders and answer any queries.

7. Why are you getting rid of the annual membership fee?

The main reason NACRE started the oil buying scheme was to help people, especially the vulnerable, who rely on heating oil. Over the last few years heating oil has been painfully expensive, so by ordering collectively we have the ability to negotiate a much more competitive price for the benefit of all our members. The scheme is open to everyone and the more members there are the more negotiating power we have each month.

The original system was based on a £20 membership fee. This means that if you order 1000 litres of fuel a year you are paying more per litre for your membership than someone that orders 2500 litres. This is not very equitable.

Some members also reported that it was inconvenient to send in a cheque or make an internet payment for their membership fee each year. We aim to make the scheme as efficient as possible for everyone involved. It takes a great deal of time to process the membership and renewal payments which increases staff costs. The more efficient we can be the better.

8. What about the membership fee I have already paid for this year?

Most of you will have renewed your membership within the last 12 months. If you register on the new website before 1st August 2016 you will receive a discount, calculated as a pro rata proportion of your outstanding membership fee. You will then be able to apply this as a discount code against your first oil order through the new system.

9. How will I pay for the scheme now?

Instead of taking an annual membership fee we will be adding a small levy to the oil order each month. Due to the volumes of oil we are purchasing you will still be getting your oil cheaper than if you were buying it by yourself.

10. Will the new scheme cost me more?

It depends. The £20 annual membership fee meant that everyone paid the same, no matter how much oil they ordered each year. This is not very equitable as it means those people using less oil pay more per litre for their membership than those ordering larger quantities of oil each year. So, if you only order small quantities you will be paying less than you were with the £20 annual membership. But be assured, everyone will be saving money when ordering oil through our community oil buying scheme as we have the power of bulk buying. And, the more efficient we can make the process for NACRE and the oil companies, the greater savings we would hope to achieve and pass on to our members.

11. If you are a charity, why do we have to pay for the scheme?

Although we are a charity, we rely on paid staff to carry out the work we do. We do use the services of volunteers in some areas of our work, but in general we have staff and office costs to pay. Our staff are professional, efficient, reliable and hard-working and to keep them happy we have to pay them! We are non-profit making and find it increasingly difficult to source funds to enable us to carry out our work. So, we have to make the oil buying scheme pay for itself.



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12. Why can't I know what the price is before I place my order?

Before we can negotiate with the oil suppliers, we need to know what the total number of litres we are ordering and how many delivery drops that is made up of. The suppliers cannot give us a price until they know what they are quoting for. You can be assured that the price we achieve will be extremely competitive and excellent value. If you are not happy with the price we are achieving then you can leave the scheme at any time. Equally you can re-join the scheme at any time if you change your mind.

13. How do I know if I am getting the best price?

Some people are happy to ring round various suppliers and negotiate a price for themselves so they have the flexibility of ordering oil when they want it, have control over who supplies it and at what price. But not everyone has the time or inclination to do this. If you are short of time and would rather have the peace of mind that you are getting the best price possible, then this scheme will really save you money and hassle.

Since our scheme started, we have consistently been able to obtain great prices for our customers, well below the average price per litre quoted by the oil companies. The more members who order = the more oil ordered = the better the ability to negotiate a lower price.

14. What if I miss the order deadline?

The new system will 'close' at 12 noon on the deadline day and it will **not** be possible to add your order after that time. At a later stage, we hope to offer the opportunity for late orders to be accepted for approximately 24-48 hours after the order window has closed. But there is likely to be an additional charge for using this late order window.

15. How will I know who will deliver my oil?

Once the price negotiation has taken place and an agreement has been made with the oil supplier, you will receive an email to advise you of the supplier, price, when your payment will be taken and any other relevant information. Contact information will also be provided should you have any queries.

16. I have a local coordinator, should I still deal with them or should I go direct to the website?

If you can use the website yourself, then it makes sense to manage your account directly. You can always liaise directly with the Project Officer at NACRE on 01604 765888 if you have any queries.

17. What should I do if my internet is down and I cannot get to the website to make my order?

You will be able to phone NACRE and with your permission, we can access your account on the website to make the order on your behalf.

18. Who will I be placing my order with?

Your order will be taken by eSmartMetrics Limited, who will be acting on NACRE's behalf and placing the group order with the winning oil supplier. By grouping together payments and maximising efficiencies for both NACRE and the oil supplier we aim to maximise the savings available to our members.



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19. How will I pay for my heating oil?

Payment by members online is by credit/debit card through NACRE's secure section on the **olive** website. All major debit and credit cards are accepted. There is no charge for debit card use, but there is a fee of 2% for credit cards.

You will be asked to enter your card details as part of your account registration or as part of your first online order. From 1st August 2016, it will only be possible to place an order once a valid payment card has been stored with our Payment Provider for your account. This information will only be used to purchase your oil order and **Olive/NACRE** does not and cannot store card details on the site.

20. Why can't I continue to pay the oil supplier direct?

Currently, NACRE negotiates the price on your behalf and you pay the supplier. By paying through our new website for your oil we can then pay the oil company one payment for all of the oil orders. This means they can optimise their route planning and they don't have to spend time taking payments from every member. This increased efficiency will enable us to negotiate a better price.

21. How secure are my card details?

Members can safely enter payment card details via the website and secure PCI DSS-compliant Payment Provider, which encrypts all submitted information.

To ensure the highest possible level of online payment security, all payments are secured with:

- Security Code (CV2) Checks
- IP Address Checking
- PCI Compliant Servers

With our online Payment Provider you're using one of the most secure online payment services currently available. They process millions of card transactions every year and guarantee 100% payment protection for online businesses and their customers.

All payment card details are held on the secure Payment Provider's website. **Olive/NACRE** does not and cannot store card details on the site.

22. Can I pay by cheque?

For those members not online NACRE offers the facility to pay by cheque. Cheques should be made payable to eSmartMetrics Limited and sent to NACRE after the oil price has been confirmed. On receipt the cheque will be banked and the oil will be delivered **after** payment has cleared. This method will not be as quick as paying by card through the website.

23. Do you offer a monthly payment scheme?

Not at the moment, but we are looking to offer this as a future development.

24. I usually pay the delivery driver cash or cheque. Can I continue to do this?

No, I'm afraid this is not possible. The oil companies do not generally accept this form of payment these days either, although some of them make exceptions for long standing customers. These days most internet users buy goods and/or services on the internet using their credit or debit card. The oil buying website will be no different. Please see the secure payment point above for more details on how this service will work.



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25. What if the address of the property I want the oil to go to is different to my home address?

You should register the address you want the oil delivered to - this does not have to be your home address. We will look to add multiple properties to a single account in the future.

26. Is this scheme only for domestic oil users?

No, anyone that uses oil can join the Community Oil Buying Scheme in Northamptonshire. Community Buildings (village halls, schools, churches, sports clubs and scout huts included) can order their oil, but you need to be clear about the type of heating oil you require (28 or 35 second burn) and be able to pay by card on the internet (please contact us if you have any queries with this). Businesses can also join, but please be aware that commercial VAT rates (at 20%) **may** be applied.

27. Do you use local oil suppliers?

All the suppliers that we negotiate with deliver across all of Northamptonshire, even though some of them may send their delivery vehicles in from outside the county. If you feel strongly about only using local companies, then you may wish to contact your chosen supplier directly. We choose to use businesses in the region that can provide a good service at the most competitive price.

28. I'm worried about the carbon footprint of using an oil supplier from outside the county.

We have asked all the oil suppliers we use for their Environmental Policy so we can be assured that they are doing their bit to keep carbon emissions as low as possible. By receiving such a large order at one time, the oil companies can plan their delivery routes to be as efficient as possible, saving fuel and therefore reducing emissions.

29. What if I'm not happy about any of the changes?

If you're not happy then please let us know and we will try our best to work things out. The new system may not suit everyone, but we hope that it will work well for the majority and even bring in a lot more members. If we do not make the changes we cannot be sure of the scheme's future. Please let us have your feedback on the new scheme to help us with future development.

Have you got any other questions?

If yes, please telephone 01604 765888 or email oil@northantsacre.org.uk.