

Low Carbon Communities

A study of community energy projects in the UK

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1.0 The purpose of the study

The aim of the research is to provide a better understanding of the community energy project, particularly in the rural context. The research examines information and data that relates to community energy projects in the broadest sense; from energy efficiency to renewable energy generation. This information has been sourced from research reports, the media, case studies and academics. This research is not exhaustive; we have tried to provide a snapshot of current activity. The case study analysis will examine the community energy project in more detail; the dynamics, involvement, motivation, lessons learned and future plans. The case studies selected are not statistically representative but provide good illustrative examples of grass-roots activity in rural areas.

2.0 Introduction

Climate change is happening. According to the recent fourth synthesis report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Bernstein et al, 2007), greenhouse gas emissions have risen by 70% since 1970, and will rise by between 25% and 90% over the next 25 years under "business as usual". That rise will mainly be caused by an expansion in the use of fossil fuels, which are set to continue as the world's dominant energy source. The report said temperatures were probably going to increase by 1.8-4C (3.2-7.2F) by the end of the century.

Consumers International statistics (AccountAbility & Consumers International, 2007) showed that 90% of the public accepts climate change is caused by human activity. But in stark contrast only 7% thought they were able to do something about it and, of that 7%, only 3% try to live sustainably. This highlights the potential impact that collective action to tackle change could have in effectively mobilising individuals to take action.

2.1 The rural context

Community energy projects are located all over the UK. The vast majority of projects are rural. Walker (2007) suggests that some renewable technologies, like wind turbines or biomass heating, are more suited to rural areas, where they can provide a new source of income for farmers. Also rural people are less well integrated into energy infrastructure than the urban population. Many villages are off the gas network and electricity supplies may be unreliable, so there is more drive towards alternative sources of energy. 36% of rural properties are off gas network, compared to 5% of urban properties (Baker and Preston, 2006). People living in rural areas also have greater opportunity to act; the location of rural households lends itself more easily to accommodating the installation of small-scale renewable energy schemes.

The extensive problem of 'hard-to-treat' properties¹ is so extensive in rural areas that new approaches to targeting rural fuel poor households is required according to a recent report to the Eaga Partnership Charitable Trust (Baker and Preston, 2006).

2.2 Meaning of community

The reference to 'community' is open to analysis and debate; what does constitute a 'real' or 'true' community project? Who are the community, how cohesive and inclusive is it, how is it involved in a community energy project and how does it benefit: all these are open to interpretation. The use of the term 'community' according to Walker et al (2007), embodies '*implications and assumptions about the nature and quality of relationships between people and organisations*' that are part of '*the community*'. Walker et al (2007) explore the meanings, context and dynamics of community renewable energy. Their research highlighted the different interpretations of 'community', concluding that:

'community projects are those in which process and/or outcome dimensions are to some degree local and collective'.

¹ 'Hard-to-treat' properties are older buildings, including dwellings, that are difficult to make more energy efficient. For example, buildings with solid walls' no loft space or no connection to low cost fuel such as oil or gas.

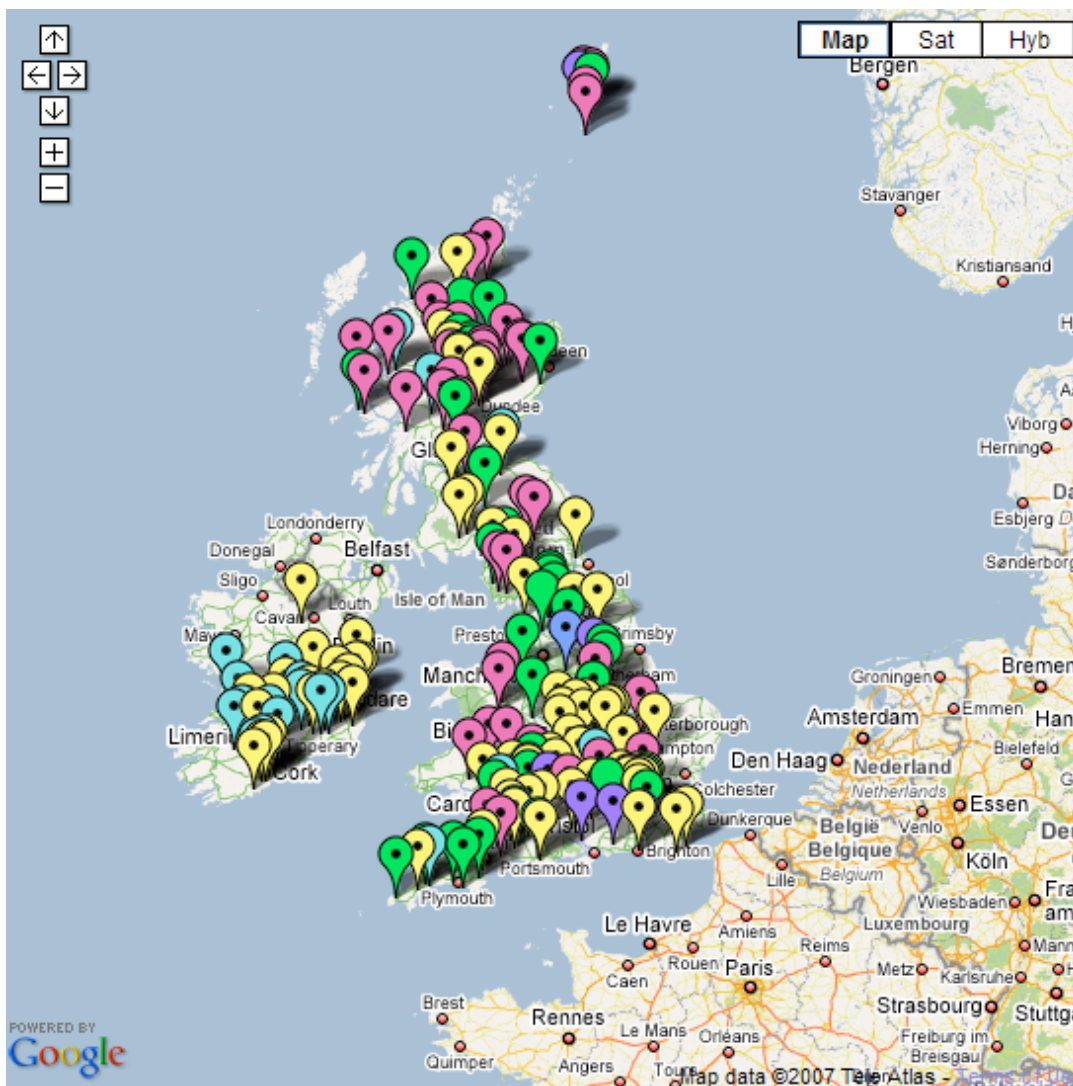
The case studies selected for analysis for this research all constitute a 'community' project based on this definition.

3.0 Who's doing what?

3.1 The mapping

As part of this research, in March 2007 ruralnet|uk started to map community energy initiatives. This activity is ongoing and provides an authoritative, impartial look at the collective action happening all over the UK and Ireland. The mapping provides a snapshot of activity currently taking place. The map includes community energy projects, school projects, climate change organisations, other networks and climate change groups. This research focuses on community energy projects.

Figure 1: The Google Map of energy initiatives available at www.ruralaction.org.uk



The mapping work that is being undertaken has collated information sourced from the internet, from other community energy projects, from climate change organisations and from individuals getting in touch with ruralnet|uk directly via phone or leaving a comment online². The mapping of community energy projects is an on-going activity and we will seek to continue to identify new projects.

² Throughout the course of this research ruralnet|uk has maintained a blog-based website at www.ruralaction.org.uk

3.2 The approaches community energy projects are taking (how are they doing it?)

The process behind why and how community energy projects come into existence is particularly complex. They can encompass renewable energy technology and/or behavioural changes which focus on energy efficiency measures. Some are motivated by a feeling of making a positive difference to the environment and others relate to local needs, such as supporting the regeneration of a deprived area.

The 'eco-village' concept has been in existence since the seventies and settlements such as Findhorn and Bishops Castle have developed 'to encompass' both renewable energy and behavioural changes. These communities are intended to be socially, economically and ecologically sustainable. A key principle of these settlements is that most of the resources they use should be produced inside the community, giving it a significant independence from the external world. This holistic approach has also been adopted by the 'Transition' movement, which is rapidly being adopted by many towns and villages around the UK. Transition 'towns' consider the impact of 'Peak Oil'³ as being central to their activities. The Transition Town movement began in 2005 in Totnes and focuses on a sustainable way of living which sees 'transition' as moving away from a dependence on fossil fuels to create robust, self-reliant communities for the future. There are now 29 'communities' (towns, villages or collection of local people) adopting the 'transition' approach around the UK: now, with Transition Sunshine Coast⁴ having just been officially awarded its Transition status, the concept has reached as far as Australia.

Some community energy projects are focussed on 'carbon emissions' with a target to become 'carbon neutral'. These projects have energy efficiency at the core of their activities and look to reduce carbon emissions through behavioural changes. 'Going Carbon Neutral Ashton Hayes' has reported a reduction in carbon emissions of 20% in their first year (Alexander et al, 2007) from implementing energy saving measures through a village-wide energy awareness campaign. This group and others like them are looking to help tackle climate change at a local level, collectively. Global Witness⁵, recognises that climate change is such a huge issue that it is only through taking it down to micro level - individuals deciding to cut long haul flights and recycle more - that people can understand how to tackle it.

Many community energy projects focus on local, community scale energy *generation*. These projects have sometimes been driven by the need to address practical local needs rather than primarily by wider energy or climate change concerns. Across our case studies these local needs included: supplying reliable electricity to an off-grid community (Knoydart Renewables); ensuring that the local community would benefit from a nearby wind farm development (FREE); and regenerating the local economy and setting up educational projects (Awel Aman Tawe). Community renewable energy generation has emerged over the past five years in the UK as a new theme of government policy and a substantial focus for local activity on the ground. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Houghton et al 2001), renewable energy generally has a positive impact on energy security and employment; validating positive support measures from government.

Walker (2007) describes these projects as being implemented in many forms, shapes and sizes, both in terms of the technology 'hardware' and the 'software' of social arrangements through which the technology is utilised. Indeed, our research has identified hydro-electric turbines, wind turbines and photovoltaic technologies being utilised, with the 'community' structure of the project

³ 'Peak Oil refers to the fact that the world is about to reach the peak of possible oil production. This is happening at a time when demand for oil is at its highest and growing. This has serious and far reaching implications for world peace, energy costs and so on. At the very least we can expect oil prices to rise sharply in the short to medium term as demand outstrips supply. <http://peakoil.org.uk/>

⁴ See <http://transitionculture.org/2007/10/03/australias-first-transition-town/>

⁵ Pressure group that works on the relationship between mass environmental destruction and human rights

varying from Parish Council-led to being a project led by a handful of local residents working to develop relations with the community so that the project becomes 'community-owned'.

4.0 The initiation and evolution of the community energy project

4.1 The models of activity – Transition vs Carbon Neutrality

During the initial project analysis, it was identified that a community energy project can have a focus which is primarily on the cutting of carbon emissions or on the 'transition' away from oil dependence. The latter are driven by the concept of 'Peak Oil'. In real life these two foci represent the two extremes of a spectrum (see Figure 2).

Carbon focused projects are generally very target orientated and focus on a single measure - the carbon foot print of the community, with some projects having the overall aim of becoming 'carbon neutral'.

Peak oil focused projects tend to take on a more holistic and long term strategy which tries to engage with as many parts of the community as possible, including other community groups and organisations. A 'peak oil' or 'transition' initiative will often re-vitalise the activity of all the existing groups in a community and provide them with a new focus. The Women's Institute will start to focus on local food more vigorously, the local cyclists on sustainable transport and so on. The level of engagement of each group with the 'peak oil' theme will wax and wane as the core initiative progresses.

Other projects are developed from a specific local need, such as regenerating the local economy. Awel Aman Tawe (AAT) for example, is a project which supports activities that contribute to the regeneration of the local economy, such as job creation and is not specifically measuring carbon emission reductions for the area; it is an ever expanding project for 'social rejuvenation' which came from one idea to develop a community owned wind farm.

4.2 The case studies

The case studies selected for this research provide an illustrative example of the types of projects which exist around the UK. The process of selection for these case studies was made on the basis of the type of technology they are employing (if any), who they are engaging with and what their focus is. More detail about the methodology behind the case study selection, interview process and further case study information can be found in Appendix 1. In this way, we have tried to represent the spectrum of community energy projects that currently exist around the UK.

Table 1: Key aspects of the case study projects

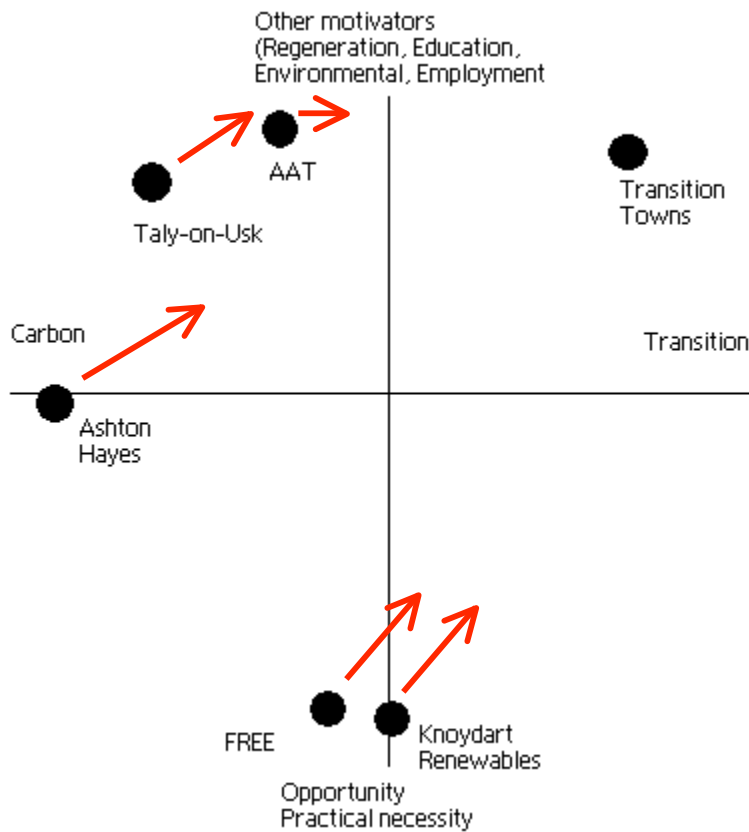
| Location | Technology context or focus | Institution | Funding |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|-------------|
| Fintry | Community-owned wind turbine | Community Development Trust | £2.5million |
| Knoydart | Hydro-electric scheme | Company limited by guarantee | £500,000 |
| Upper Amman & Swansea Valleys (AAT) | Community regeneration-energy education and efficiency project, with community wind farm development | Company limited by guarantee with not-for-profit constitution | On-going |
| Forest Row | Peak Oil - developing Energy Descent Plan | N/a | N/a |
| Ashton Hayes | Carbon neutrality -energy efficiency | Parish Council led | £8,000 |

Full case studies will be made available online at www.ruralaction.org.uk

The reasons why community energy projects are initiated vary. The motivation can come from a practical necessity; the hydro scheme at Knoydart, for example, was a refurbishment project with reliable, clean electricity generation being the main motivation behind its refurbishment. Different motivations lay behind the other projects: Awel Aman Tawe had the regeneration of the local area as main motivator through the development of a community-owned wind farm, Transition Forest Row has 'Peak Oil' and transitioning away from life reliant upon fossil fuels at the project's core, which encompasses both environmental and social motivators, while Ashton Hayes focuses on reducing the collective carbon footprint of the community.

We have examined each of the case studies in relation to what the motivating dimension was for the project's creation. As shown in Figure 2, the case study projects can be positioned in relation to these dimensions.

Figure 2: Initiators diagram locating the motivating dimension



Many of the projects identified through ruralnet|uk's research have environmental concerns as their starting point and want to make a contribution to tackling climate change. As projects move up and right from the cross-section, they are broadening their focus and community base. A trend appears in the direction that the projects are taking from when they were first started, to where they are now.

The arrows on this diagram emphasis how the initial motivating factor can expand to encompass other factors as the project develops. In the case of FREE and Knoydart Renewables, the projects are moving upwards this is because the original 'initiator' for both of these projects related to an opportunity (FREE) and a practical necessity (Knoydart), but as time has gone by both projects have started to consider other factors such as energy efficiency.

Community energy projects can contribute significantly to the sustainable development of rural communities. Working as and for the community through civil engagement can enhance trust between people and organisations, an outcome which builds local capacity for future and further collective action (Walker, 2007, Seyfang and Smith, 2006). This further action can be focused on

energy-related issues or it can lead to activity centred on other matters such as job creation, education or regeneration. As the Initiators diagram illustrates, the reason behind why a project is created can often be replaced and enhanced, as the project develops, when other factions of a community get involved. The purpose, and the project by default, broadens.

5.0 Current support for community energy projects

Organisations that provide advice/training to support community energy projects are listed in Appendix 2. Support of different types is available from: the Government, the private sector (utilities), charities and social enterprises. The foci of support are: energy efficiency, renewable energy, fuel poverty, climate change, public awareness and encouraging self-help.

6.0 Current funding for community energy projects

Recent research undertaken by Community Energy Plus (2006) identified 60 potential sources of funding that community groups could access to develop an energy project. The research pointed out that none of these sources specifically offers non-capital funding that groups could use to raise awareness, engage with the issues and make progress to develop local energy projects. The Community Energy Plus (2006) research identified a number of key issues for community groups in accessing energy funding routes in the UK. These included:

- Issues of complexity in terms of the application, reporting and monitoring requirements which are beyond the capacity of many community groups
- Poor marketing of these funds to the community sector. The research found that information about potential sources of funding were not reaching the groups that would find it most interesting
- The structure of the funding is not appropriate for community sector; the timing for the delivery, the need of the applicant to understand the technical aspects of sustainable energy, match-funding and lack of flexibility.

The research also identified barriers to accessing the broader range of funding for environmental and community initiatives, such as:

- Many broader funds do not identify energy efficiency as an issue
- Some fund facilitators see energy efficiency as a specialist area in which they have no expertise – with some funders this has resulted in some cases where funders actively steer groups away from this area.

Defra's Climate Challenge Fund is noted in the report as being a good example of potential funding for non-capital projects, with a simple application form and payment procedure. However, one off calls for bids like this can undermine a project as applications are rushed and often designed around the funding programme's criteria rather than around the community's aspirations. The Climate Challenge Fund funds renewable energy and biodiversity projects, as well as energy efficiency projects, however, it is also only available in England, so does not fill any gaps in the devolved nations.

Community Energy Plus (2006) also recognises that many organisations in the energy sector are helping community groups access grants – through help and support, securing funding to work with the group and through sign-posting. Many energy utility companies have established small-grant programmes, but most of these are funding for capital projects, such as E.ON Source and EDF Green Fund.

Community Energy Plus (2006) identified some broader issues that may help to explain why community groups do not always apply to existing funding opportunities. These included issues such as lack of knowledge, interest, support and resources; indeed one of the issues identified was a lack of knowledge or information on successful projects already achieved.

6.1 Funding from the philanthropic sector

The issue of climate change poses specific challenges for community-based initiatives in terms of funding, as it does not share the characteristics of typical issues for such initiatives (local and immediate, known beneficiaries and clear/measurable outputs). According to the Environmental Funders Network “Trust funders remain daunted by the scale of the issues these groups are tackling⁶”. The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation is one of just a handful of charitable foundations that have actively funded projects focusing on climate change.

6.2 Funding from private sector

Climate change is high on the agenda for most corporations, with many now having detailed climate change policies on how they will reduce their carbon footprint as an organisation. Utility companies such as E.ON and EDF Energy are funding community energy projects through grants for small-scale capital projects and EAGA Partnership provide grant-funding for projects which address the issue of fuel poverty. Gaps in funding from this sector are discussed in more detail in section 7.2.

6.3 Government initiatives

The UK Climate Change Bill will form a fundamental part of the UK's strategy to tackle climate change and address the issues raised by the Stern Review (Stern 2006). The Climate Change Programme (HM Government 2006), sets out the Defra's (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) policies and priorities for action in the UK and internationally. Subsequently, the Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006 placed an obligation on Defra to report to Parliament on greenhouse gas emissions in the UK and action taken by Government to reduce these emissions. The target for cutting emissions remains unchanged at 60 percent by 2050. The Government will ask the newly formed Climate Change Committee to report on whether this target should be strengthened by September 2009.

Table 2 provides details of the grant funding that the Government has put in place to offer support to micro-generation projects. These projects are not necessarily community-based, but many community energy projects apply to these programmes for funding.

Table 2: Government led initiatives supporting and funding community renewable energy in the UK

| Initiative | Purpose | Date Started | Spatial Coverage | Technologies |
|---|--|--------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Community Action for Energy (CAFÉ) | Advice, information, training and support | 2001 | UK | Energy efficiency with related renewable energy technologies |
| Community Renewables Initiative (CRI) | Support and project development | 2002 | 10 areas within England | Solar roofs, biomass and wood heat schemes, farm waste schemes, wind turbines |
| Clear Skies | Capital Funding | 2003 | England, Wales and Northern Island | Solar thermal, wind turbines, micro/small scale hydro turbines, ground source heat pumps, room heaters/stoves with automated wood pellet feed, wood fuelled boiler systems |
| Scottish Community and Households Renewables Initiative (SCHRI) | Advice, support, project development and capital funding | 2002 | Scotland | Micro hydro-electric, micro wind, solar water and space heating, ground-source heat pumps, automated wood fuel heating systems, solar PV in dwellings not connected to the electricity grid |
| Community Energy | Guidance, training, | 2002 | UK | Community Heating Scheme using; heat from power generation (CHP); |

⁶ 'Donors fight shy of green campaigns', The SocietyGuardian, 24 Oct 2007.

| | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------|----|---|
| | development and capital grants | | | boilers using conventional or renewable fuels, heat from a geothermal well or heat pumps; waste heat from industrial processes or energy from waste plant |
| Energy Saving Trust (EST) Photovoltaics Programme | Capital grants | 2002 | UK | Solar photovoltaics |
| Low Carbon Buildings Programme | Capital grants | 2005 | UK | Installation of micro-generation technologies. LCBP designed to be more holistic than PV and Clear Skies programmes |

Source: Walker (2007) Community Energy Initiatives: Embedding Sustainable Technology at a Local Level: Full Research Report.

6.4 The Government's support for community energy projects

A 'coalition of interests' (Walker 2007) came together in the late 1990's in which government, NGOs and others found it useful to work within a 'community theme'. This resulted in a complicated infrastructure of public, civil society and private programmes and networks which have evolved since, containing many motivations and objectives. The Government found that supporting the 'community' approach provided a way of overcoming planning objections which obstructed the development of many wind farms and could help to regenerate rural areas which had been badly affected by foot and mouth.

With the statutory sector bodies increasingly looking to commission work from community and voluntary groups, there will be a growing range of environment and climate change related services being contracted out through Local Area Agreements. It is therefore very important that community projects are brought to the Local Strategic Partnership, where successful activity has the opportunity to be further supported and replicated. Local authorities are being encouraged to support action against climate change through the last Beacon Awards scheme of 'Tackling Climate Change'; running from March to June 2007 there were nine applicant authorities for the award⁷. However, following a survey at the start of 2007 by The Sustainable Development Commission which illustrated a lack of 'drivers' for councils to consider climate change, Communities and Local Government are currently consulting on the technical details of the proposed indicator; reflecting the recognition of the important role local authorities can play in fighting climate change by reducing carbon dioxide emissions, both through their own actions and by setting an example to the wider community.

6.5 The Big Lottery

In January 2008 The Big Lottery announced their Community Sustainable Energy Programme which will be launched in April 2008. This is a £10.1 million grant scheme managed by BRE (Building Research Establishment). The scheme is part of the Big Lottery's Changing Spaces programme, which aims to improve rural and urban environments and enable communities across England to lead healthier and more environmentally sustainable lifestyles. Groups can apply for grants to install small-scale energy efficient technology such as wind turbines and solar panels on sites including village halls, visitor centres or schools. Funding to improve building insulation is also offered, along with funding for feasibility studies.

7.0 Gaps in funding and support

Undertaking this research has identified that a lack of funding is not generally an issue for projects that require some sort of capital installation, however funding for non-capital activities such as awareness-raising, are not specifically offered by most of the potential sources of funding (Community Energy Plus 2006). Indeed, one of the recommendations made by Community

⁷ <http://beacons.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=7319852>

Energy Plus (2006) is a new small grant fund dedicated to supporting community groups with non-capital efficiency activities.

As non-capital activity, there is also a complete lack of funding for information exchange and knowledge transfer between community energy projects. The CAFE programme, from the Energy Saving Trust provides an excellent information resource, but does not have the resource to network its members. In the ECRC funded report, Walker (2007) makes the recommendation that future policy needs to focus on a way of sharing knowledge and inspiring further collective action:

“Develop far more effective practical and strategic mechanisms for learning lessons and sharing experience and knowledge – a key prescription of the niche management literatures

Actively support the potentially catalytic effects of initial local projects in stimulating further phases of collective activity and the take up of sustainable technologies in other settings such as local households”

Indeed, even though the lack of this type of support has been cited by several authors and a primary reason for the failure of community initiatives, the most recent funding pots, such as The Big Lottery Fund, still does not recognise the benefits to a support network and cites only feasibility studies as the only activity eligible under project development.

The recent report by Community Energy Plus (2007), produced for the Education and Community Group of Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes, examined the funding for community-based sustainable energy projects. It criticised national and regional websites as a resource to groups looking for information on grant funding to support their idea/project:

‘information or connection to funding opportunities is often minimal or out of date’.

The report concluded that the funding sector has a desire to prioritise projects that the government does not fund and so, as climate change continues to feature in the media and politics it could influence funders either way. This could mean that some may recognise the importance of providing support to tackle it, whilst for others it may reinforce the impression that tackling climate change is the responsibility of government.

There is a recognised gap in funding for developing learning, sharing experience and capacity building among community groups taking forward energy-related projects. The ruralnet|2007 plenary panel session ‘Collective Approaches to Climate Change’⁸ provided feedback from three panelists who are all community advocates involved with community energy projects. They all commented on the need for a way of being able to network groups together so that they can share knowledge and learn from each others’ successes and failures. This lively and insightful panel session highlighted the importance and benefits of taking a collective approach to tackling climate change. Collective approaches effectively ‘tap’ into the wealth of knowledge and experience that exists within our communities. This ‘Collective Genius’ was discussed as something that is incredibly important and valuable to communities undertaking energy projects as it can be used to create something greater and stronger than the individual can.

7.1 Charitable foundations & trusts

In the Community Energy Plus (2007) report, their review of existing funding opportunities suggested that although there are over 50 charitable trusts and foundations that could support community based energy projects, nationally only eight makes a specific reference to climate change, renewable energy or energy efficiency *‘suggesting that most funders still do not see this as a priority for support’*. This is indeed reflected in the CAF 2006 book of Charitable Foundations, where the eight foundations are listed as having ‘Energy Issues’ as a funding priority, with just twenty four further foundations willing to consider funding this area. This is encouraging, but less significant considering that there are well over 1600 major charitable trusts operating in the UK.

⁸ <http://ruralnet.typepad.com/ruralnet2007/2007/10/day-2-1340-1450.htm>

7.2 Private sector

According to the Community Energy Plus (2007) report there has been a sea-change in company giving over recent years. The previous cash-based philanthropy is being replaced more and more by a donation linked to a marketing scheme which will develop the image of the company. In addition, companies favour an approach which engages their own staff to support local charities by offering employee time within the voluntary sector. This restricts opportunities to causes linked to a company's agenda or geographic area. Another trend identified by the report is the move by large companies to decentralise their budgets for community support to local or regional teams. Larger companies are also taking a more proactive approach which creating priorities and choosing causes that they will support, rather than responding to need.

As previously mentioned in section 6.2, utility companies are supporting community energy projects by providing grants, but these grants are for capital expenditure only and do not incorporate any on-going support or advice to ensure the projects long-term success and sustainability.

8.0 The next 5 years and the future for community energy projects

Politically, the government's draft Climate Change Bill - which ministers say shows Britain is "leading by example", sets out plans to reduce carbon emissions by a minimum of 60%, from the 1990 base level, by 2050 - and sets an interim target of "at least 26% but not more than 32%" by 2020. The Energy Review published in June 2006 recognises involvement of individuals as critical in delivering long-term cuts in carbon emissions. As part of the Review, the Government carried out a study to examine the role of 'community level' approaches to 'mobilising' individuals, and to look at the supportive role that Authorities can take. As part of this, a Defra study carried out by CSE & CDX (2007) 'Mobilising individual behavioural change through community initiatives: Lessons for climate change', highlighted the need for a 'realistic sense of collective agency' which moves individuals and communities from the inaction of "I will if you will" to the dynamism of "We have...now you". The report findings recognise the influence that a collective approach can have within a political context:

"[a key requirement for future success] should make explicit the political significance of many people starting to take action in concert and demonstrate the way in which this genuinely underpins the legitimacy of UK leadership in seeking a global solution to the threat"

The report concluded that sustained funding sources are important in building social networks, trust and social cohesion. The interviews undertaken within the research affirm that a national policy context is important in stimulating and shaping community initiatives – and that effective community initiatives are likely to be a necessary component of a coherent national approach to tackling climate change.

In November 2007, the Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced that the UK's emission target of a 60% cut by 2050 could be increased to 80%. The Prime Minister said climate change had been the product of many generations, but "overcoming it must be the great project of this generation".

He will introduce a new Green Homes Service - a telephone line, website and advice centres – which aims to provide a single point of contact for people who want a "home energy audit". A "green hotline" will advise people on what they can do to cut their impact on the environment. This approach would make information on energy efficiency much more accessible, but people would still have to be motivated to engage with the service. Moreover actions at both individual and community level would benefit from support, and this initiative seems currently to target only individuals.

Professional organisations such as the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)⁹ and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)¹⁰ are taking climate change into consideration and examining ways to support remedial action, indeed these organisations highlighted the importance of community led renewable energy projects when in March 2007, they organised a joint conference titled 'Climate Change – how can planning meet the challenge?'. Changes have now (December 2007) been announced to the planning system which will mean all councils will be expected to provide for on-site renewable energy and local community energy schemes to help cut carbon emissions from new developments. The new Planning Policy Statement on Climate Change will:

- Ensure local plans have strong carbon ambitions and targets
- Help to deliver decentralised renewable and low carbon energy
- Speed up the shift to renewable and low carbon energy
- Create communities that are resilient to the effects of climate change

Housing Minister Yvette Cooper said

"It's all about local power. If we are to reach the ambitious zero carbon standards we need a revolution in the way we heat and power our homes. We want councils to do more to back local green energy."

8.1 The importance of rural areas

As part of this research, we have examined the community energy project within the rural context due to the prevalence of such projects taking place in isolated rural villages.

The key features:

- Different and more significant opportunities exist for local energy generation (eg land-use, space, physical geography)
- The high reliance on the car for transportation make rural areas particularly vulnerable to changes in energy supply and prices
- Higher proportions of workers use the car to commute in rural areas
- Reducing travel in rural areas will provide new opportunities for increasing, or re-establishing, social cohesion in rural areas with related spin-off benefits
- A focus on reducing the carbon footprint of communities in rural areas will generate future local employment opportunities in the fields of power generation, distribution, energy efficiency, engineering, building services, construction and utilities
- Increased community ownership and control of energy generation provide the key to sustaining rural communities in future.
- Urban England needs rural England for: food, leisure, a carbon sink, energy production – eg biofuels and wind power

Recently, in October 2007 the Government announced that the Rural Advocate, Stuart Burgess, will produce a report on ways the rural economy can be further strengthened. He has proposed that his report will focus primarily on releasing more of the potential of rural economies. Activities will include:

- Inspiring tiers of government to recognise the contribution of rural economies and their further potential
- Providing distinctive measures to boost innovation and the knowledge economy in rural areas

⁹ <http://www.rtpi.org.uk>

¹⁰ <http://www.tcpa.org.uk>

The report from the Rural Advocate presents an opportunity to present the case for the 'rural' community energy project – which could help to ensure that policy related to community energy projects is suitably 'rural-proofed', and that rural advantages are appropriately exploited

Research from various surveys and analysis suggests that around 1 in 5 people live in poverty in rural areas and that nearly half of those in poverty are in working households¹¹. Rural areas suffer from financial poverty, access poverty and network poverty; all three factors affect how rural people experience disadvantage and how they escape from disadvantage. For example, in 2005 the average rural household paid £60 per week more on commodities than urban areas¹²; this may be due to higher transport costs or the smaller economies of scale available to the local village shop. A community energy project can help address these by bringing people together, helping to raise the awareness of the benefits to being energy efficient and perhaps help to support vulnerable people overcome other barriers or disadvantage. Challenging new targets set for suppliers (under the Energy Efficiency Commitment – EEC2) and Local Authorities (under the Home Energy Conservation Act) come at a time when most of the easily accessible housing stock has already been insulated. Community Energy Plus (2006) identified the community sector as becoming "*an increasingly important audience to work with if energy efficiency in harder to reach homes is to be improved*". Most 'harder to reach' homes are located in rural areas.

Opportunities lie in the strong social capital apparent in rural communities that provide the foundations for a locally based and owned response to climate change. Indeed according to statistics published by the CRC (2007), in 2005 10% of residents from villages and hamlets had attended a public meeting about local services or problems, compared to 5% in urban areas.

The land offers valuable potential for both CO₂ extraction and for the production of biofuels and windpower which could replace fuels with higher net emissions (CRC, 2007¹³).

9.0 ruralnet | uk recommendations

The following recommendations are based around the identified need for a national support network for community energy projects which would help to support current groups and inspire new activity. Community groups can access the funding required for capital projects but funding towards raising awareness around energy efficiency and accessing the appropriate and timely support appears to be much more problematic.

9.1 From energy projects

As part of this research, representatives of the case studies were asked to comment on how a networking initiative would have helped them had it been in place during their development. They were also asked how such an initiative would help them moving forward.

Knoydart Renewables Ltd

Angela Williams, the Development Manager at Knoydart Renewables Ltd, emphasised the intrinsic value of being part of a network when there is limited opportunity for her to do so, due to the location of the project being in the isolated Western coast of the Knoydart Peninsula. She feels that a network would enable her to participate in joint-learning and joint-sharing of experience and ideas. As the Development Manager of the project for several years, she has a great deal of experience of the Knoydart hydro-electric scheme and has a number of very useful contacts; this knowledge could be fed into a network, for the benefit of other groups wishing to establish similar projects. As a successful project, Angela is keen to support the replication of small scale hydro-electric projects around the country and feels that a national network would definitely facilitate this, adding that the de-centralised nature of a network would open up opportunities to share ideas too. Angela noted that her project now provides an efficient and clean source of electricity to

¹¹ Rural Disadvantage: Priorities for Action (June 2006). Commission for Rural Communities.

¹² The State of the Countryside 2007. Commission for Rural Communities

¹³ The State of the Countryside 2007. Commission for Rural Communities

the village of Inverie, but that it is now becoming a victim of its own success, with residents losing a sense of energy efficiency. When the plant was inefficient, residents would select and use their appliances with caution but with the plant now providing such a reliable source of energy people are no longer taking into consideration the amount of electricity they are using or what appliances they are using. Ironically, Angela now needs to start working with the residents to increase their awareness of energy usage, so that the production of this sustainable energy is utilised in a way that is ecologically aware.

Fintry (FREE)

Gordon Cowton is the co-founder of Fintry Renewable Energy Enterprise and thinks they would have used a networking resource if it had been available when they were starting their project. He is very keen on the idea of national/regional collaboration events for community energy groups but highlighted that no support a network could provide can replace the commitment required by a group/community to make a project work. Gordon also raised the interesting point that as a group they were inspired to take action by striking out on their own and feeling like they were the only ones doing something like this, for the community cause. They made the point that a network of knowledge sharing would be very useful but that they would hope it would not dilute this 'anarchic' approach to action, which so inspired them.

Forest Row

Mike Grenville is a resident of Forest Row and co-founder of transition Forest Row. As a very small voluntary group, there is not the resource to 're-invent the wheel', so Mike felt that it is important to be able to find tools which already exist in other places. It would be really useful to be able to hear from other communities and projects to learn from them and find out how they have developed.

Mike also expressed the potential application of video diaries of other projects which would provide a really useful tool for people just starting and who want to inform their community. Mike highlighted the fact that not everyone finds it easy to stand up in front of people, and went on to explain how video would overcome this and would also provide a less personal method of engagement which could help fuel discussion. He recommended that there should many videos, which could be rated and commented on, in a 'YouTube' fashion.

There are two more villages nearby to Forest Row who are also interested in 'Transitioning' and have contacted Mike for information – a network would help the information, experience and knowledge that Mike and other have to be 'pooled' online and provide access to people who have 'been there, done that'. Indeed, research undertaken by the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes (CAG Consultants, 2004) illustrated how important community groups can be in communicating the sustainable energy agenda and their role in taking steps to tackle climate change. A network will help to support and facilitate this communication.

Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral (AHGCN)

Ashton Hayes is being approached by numerous communities across the UK who wish to learn from the villages experiences. As a result members of the 'Going Carbon Neutral Team' give talks all over the UK. The recent project newsletter (Dec 07) highlighted how the demand for these presentations from other groups is on the increase, stating that, *"Many people have said that they find the example of our community action to be a tremendous inspiration to them in their efforts to develop their own projects"*.

Garry Charnock is the founder of AHGCN and is supportive of the networking concept, saying he would like such a network to support the projects that ask for help, and to highlight the work of particularly good case study examples. Garry recommended the employment of a 'Carbon Ambassador' who could facilitate correspondence and meetings between the project and the Local Authority; he and the other volunteers with Going Carbon Neutral Ashton Hayes spent a lot of time meeting with people within the Local Authority.

Tracey Todhunter is a local resident of the village and spends time promoting the project and her involvement in the project as an individual. Tracey is very supportive of networking initiative. As a volunteer, she has spent months talking and emailing with people from all over the country who are expressing a need for shared support and access to information and skills. Tracey said that *"it has been invaluable to validate the amount of personal time I spend on encouraging people to live a low carbon lifestyle, because I see that it is important to inspire collective action, that way we can lobby Government and businesses to make real changes and not just pay lip service to cutting emissions"*.

9.2 The Rural Community Carbon Network

Since mid 2006 ruralnet|uk has been consulting on and developing the concept of the Rural Community Carbon Network (RCCN) to link up and support community energy initiatives. It would help to facilitate knowledge transfer and effective communication so that communities can inspire and motivate action. Many community groups have welcomed the prospect of this type of support and recognise the need and the benefits it would bring¹⁴. The first step to encouraging action on climate change is to make sure people understand more about it and how it will affect them and this suggests that a local, community-based approach will become more important; with the community sector being a key audience to work with.

Who is ruralnet|uk? We are the rural networking organisation. We specialise in bringing people together, online and face to face, so that knowledge, skills, enthusiasm etc can transfer. We successfully did this for the Community Broadband Project (CBN) which we led on with the Phone Coop. The RCCN is our response to the climate change challenge and builds upon the same methodology as the CBN. We will not build a huge central team to 'run' the project. We approach things differently and have already developed systems (Experts Online¹⁵, Active Brokerage etc) to enable the network to 'help itself'. As a network, the most important players in RCCN are the communities themselves; highly committed and motivated but in desperate need of support.

At a recent national conference, delegates were asked what they thought would most help community organisations develop successful and sustainable enterprise activities. Out of the 238 delegates that answered, only two chose Business Link's 'Information, Diagnostic & Brokerage' process, while 45% thought that contact with other practitioners who had done something similar was most helpful. This confirms the findings of a series of recent studies...and is one of the key elements of support the RCCN would provide.

We have taken, and continue to take proactive action to ensure that others working in the field of climate change know our plans and we have changed our plans to ensure that what we are doing is complementary to other actions. For example we have developed the initiative in the 'open' at www.ruralaction.org.uk. We will work in collaboration with other local and national climate change agencies/organisations. The Energy Saving Trust's CAfE programme has over 1800 members and provides a good resource service to community and voluntary groups. However, the excellent membership network and services that they do provide does not support active collaboration; a key component of the RCCN. The RCCN has the support of climate change organisations and community energy projects. The summary RCCN document can be downloaded at <http://ruralnet.typepad.com/rccn/proposal/index.html>.

Defra recommendations on addressing barriers to funding, made from the Community Energy Plus (2007) research, include the creation of a new small grant fund which would be dedicated to supporting community groups with non-capital energy efficiency activities that would fill the gap identified – as discussed in sections 6.0 and 7.0. ruralnet|uk supports action towards this type of grant funding, as the RCCN proposal incorporates the distribution of a small scale grant for activities such as awareness-raising events and workshops for local community champions to engage with their neighbourhood on the subject of climate change.

¹⁴ Please view www.ruralaction.org.uk, click on 'Supporters' to view letters of support from communities and organisations

¹⁵ www.expertsonline.org.uk

Throughout this research, funding has been sought for the RCCN from the charitable and corporate sectors, and from Defra.

We have 'blogged' our progress with the funding applications and the discussions we have had with corporates at www.ruralaction.org.uk. Our experience has been frustrating. As detailed in section 6.0 and 7.0 funding for non-capital projects is not a funding priority for the sector. The RCCN does not match the requirements of a small-scale capital grant project, and hence has not attracted funding from the utilities sector either, which mostly supports projects in this way. Interestingly, one of the utility companies we approached has undertaken some of their own research which has recognised the need to network community energy projects in the way the RCCN will, and is considering adding a community area to their own website. Whilst this is welcome, it will offer only a narrow focus on the projects this utility supports and furthermore will not have the benefit of being 'by the sector, for the sector', with the added value of knowledge transfer from the wider sector which this brings (eg in funding, community engagement, legalities, project management and so on).

9.3 How the projects feed into the RCCN

The nature of the RCCN as an interactive network enables people and projects themselves to feed into the resource as well as gain benefits from it. Below is a summary of how three of the case studies can promote the work they have done to contribute to the collective knowledge which can then be transferred to other groups;

- **Fintry Renewable Energy Enterprise**
 - Experience of liaising with developer
 - Host a regional/national collaborative event
- **Knoydart Renewables Ltd**
 - Off-grid renewable energy generation
 - Hydro-electric experience – promotion for national small-scale application
 - Organising community 'Planning Days'
- **Awel Aman Tawe**
 - The PAP & SLA models –share knowledge/experience
 - Funding success
 - Implementation of a long-term strategy for a large-scale community project
- **Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral**
 - Toolkit on becoming a Carbon Neutral village
 - Publicity strategy/working with media
 - Engaging with academic institutions & undertaking research

Appendices

Appendix 1

- The desk top research

Desk top research has involved;

- Internet searches
- Interviews via the telephone to projects
- Word-of-mouth from other existing projects
- (visits)

The desk top research has been carried out by Samantha Adams, with support from the administrative team at ruralnet|uk. The size of many of the projects meant that most of them did not have a dedicated website, so phone calls proved the most effective means of communication and information gathering. However, contacting the appropriate person was difficult. This was because they were often involved in the project on a voluntary basis and were at work during normal office hours. Also some of the contact details were for an agency or organisation that supported the community group with their project and due to staff changes the appropriate person was no longer working for them.

(The desk top research has limitations. With just one contact person for the project, it could be argued that we are able to gain a more comprehensive insight into the project from a number of different perspectives. It would be preferential to speak with more than the main contact, such as members of the community themselves and others leading the project. This would provide a more comprehensive picture of each case study).

- Case study selection and analysis

A database has been developed and provides a useful snapshot of projects from which we have used to inform case study selection. The database is by no means exhaustive due to the sheer number of projects out there. The projects selected as case studies offer a good representation of the variety of projects out there; the carbon focused project; the 'peak oil' focused project and projects which help to address particular local needs. The case study selection was also informed by the initiator matrix

The Case Studies – summary information. [The full case studies will be made available online at www.ruralaction.org.uk]

Case study: Knoydart Renewables Ltd

Website: www.knoydart-foundation.com

Description:

Knoydart Renewable Ltd is a community-owned hydro-electric scheme that supplies electricity to the village of Inverie on the remote Knoydart Peninsular on the west coast of Scotland. Although on the mainland, Inverie is accessible only by ferry from the port of Mallaig or by foot, and is not connected to the national grid. Known as Knoydart Hydro Ltd, the project changed name to Knoydart Renewables Ltd in November 2006. It is a trading subsidiary of the Knoydart Foundation, a body established in 1997 to take ownership of the Knoydart Estate and whose aim is to preserve, enhance and develop the area for the well being of the environment and the people.

Structure: Knoydart Renewables Ltd is a company limited by guarantee and is a trading subsidiary of the Knoydart Foundation

Led By: Four Directors from local community and by a full time paid Development Manager (Angela Williams).

LA involved: No

Size of project: Electricity supplies residents of Inverie Bay on Knoydart Peninsular, with a population of approximately 80. Total population of Knoydart is approx 115.

Project duration: On-going

Start: 1978

End: On-going

Initiative Focus:

Carbon

Transition

Initiative content:

Energy saving

Fuel poverty

Recycling/Re-use

Food miles

Energy generation & Technology: HYDRO

Travel

Environment

Why was the project established?

The main aim of the project was and still is, to provide a cost effective, clean and efficient electricity supply to the local community of Inverie.

Who are involved?

Knoydart Renewables Ltd is run by a board of local community representatives. It employs one part time maintenance person who is supported by members of the community on a voluntary basis. Development work is contracted to Knoydart Foundation staff. Local contractors take on specialist work such as installing new cabling or high-voltage apparatus.

What support has been accessed? (Financial and advisory)

Knoydart Renewables Ltd did not originate the scheme, but took over a hydro electric project begun by a previous owner of the Knoydart Estate in the late 1970s. The 1980s and 90s saw a succession of owners which led to problems with maintenance and disputes with local people about supply. By the time Knoydart Hydro took over, the system was in a serious state of repair. By early 2001 the electricity supply was too erratic and unreliable, and was stopped, with the village moving to a backup generator.

Financial support for the project (refurbishment) came from the European Regional Development Fund, providing £500,000. The Knoydart Foundation also provided financial support towards the project. The Highlands & Islands Enterprise made a financial contribution and gave considerable support to the board throughout the refurbishment. The Highland Council also provided some support towards the project.

Case study: FREE Fintry Renewable Energy

Website: www.free-energy.org.uk

Description: FREE - Fintry Renewable Energy Enterprise - is a community development trust based in the village of Fintry, Stirlingshire, Scotland. Its aim is to promote the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency within the community to reduce CO2 emissions and the effects of global warming. FREE has agreed with the developers of a local wind farm that an additional turbine for the village will be built as part of the development. Most recently the group have formally signed an agreement with the wind farm developers that they will bear the full initial cost of the turbine and that this will be paid back over the first 15 years of operation. They are now working with two other local villages which will have wind farm developments sited close by, to facilitate constructive discussions with the developer so that these villages may benefit from the wind farm in the same way as Fintry.

Structure: Community Development Trust with 150 members

Led By: Original project activity stemmed from 4 individuals

LA involved: Community Council supportive, but not strongly involved

Size of project: Fintry Development Trust – 150 members

Project duration: On-going

Start: 2003

Initiative Focus:

Carbon

Transition

Initiative content:

Energy saving

Fuel poverty

Recycling/Re-use

Food miles

Energy generation & Technology

Travel

Environment

Why was the project established

Two main reasons: desire to do something with renewable energy as a result of increased awareness of global warming and secondly, as the prospect of a wind farm development on their doorstep was inevitable, this project was a means to ensure that the local community would benefit directly from such a development.

Who are involved

Original concept developed by 4 committed individuals, residents of Fintry. The profile of their idea was promoted throughout the village via the Community Council, newsletters, website, annual event (Fintry Fling); where a survey was also undertaken by a Glasgow University student to gauge support for the initiative. Total population of Fintry is 500 adults. The message about the wind farm and the project was widely disseminated to the village; including through local television.

What support has been accessed (financial and advisory)

- Financial: Energy Saving Trust funded initial feasibility study
Awards4All - £5000
Stirling Council - £2500

The initial cost of the wind turbine has been put forward by the wind farm development company; full installation cost of £2.5m. Fintry Development Trust has a mortgage on this over 15 years, re-payable to the wind farm development company.

- Moral support/advice: Energy Saving Trust
Political support from MSP – Sylvia Jackson

Individuals within the wind industry, who were keen to support the project as it was very positive publicity for them; it was also good to speak to people at various wind farm events.

Case study: Forest Row

Contact: Mike Grenville

Project Name: Transition Forest Row

Website: n/a

Description: A group of residents from Forest Row are working together to increase the awareness of the village to the issue of 'Peak Oil' – which will lead to behavioural; changes that will help to create a more sustainable community that is much less reliant on fossil fuels.

Structure: An informal group of residents

Led By: 8 local residents

LA involved: No – not at present, but 2 of the local residents involved do sit on the Parish Council – but the formal support of the Parish Council is yet to be confirmed.

Size of project: 8 leading residents at present (the community has a population of 3500-4000)

Project duration: On-going

Start: Spring 07

End: On-going

Initiative Focus:

Carbon

Transition

Initiative content: (ALL)

Energy saving miles

Fuel poverty

Recycling/Re-use

Food

Energy generation & Technology

Travel

Environment

Why was the project established?

“A moment of madness!” Mike Grenville, co-founder. Two motives behind forming the group; environmental and social.

Who are involved?

Core group of 8 residents taking the project forward.

What support has been accessed? (Financial and advisory)

None yet. The group is submitting an application for funding to the district council for funding to pay for the publication of the villages Energy Descent Plan (EDP) – around £5000. This would come from the councils ‘Community Projects’ pot of money. In order to apply for further funding the group will need to be constituted; something that they are currently working towards.

Case study: Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral

Project Name: Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral

Website: www.goingcarbonneutral.co.uk

Description: Ashton Hayes is a rural village located just outside Chester. Their aim is to become the first carbon neutral village in England, through energy efficiency measures and carbon offsetting; by encouraging everyone in our community to think about how their way of life affects their impact on climate change and to help people to understand how simple actions can make a big impact on CO2 emissions to the atmosphere.

Structure: Informal group

Led By: Parish Council

LA involved: Parish Council

Size of project:

Project duration: Ongoing

Start: Jan 2006 (Launched)

End: On-going

Initiative Focus:

Carbon

Transition

Initiative content:

Energy saving

Fuel poverty

Recycling/Re-use

Food miles

Energy generation & Technology

Travel

Environment

Why was the project established?

Garry Charnock wanted to do something to tackle climate change as an individual but considered this to be a difficult task as one person – as a member of the well-knit community of Ashton Hayes, he felt that tackling climate change as a community would be more effective and easier. Garry had also seen business and large organisations declaring themselves carbon neutral and wanted to see if a village could work to the same goals. He did not want the project to be seen as a pressure group within the community and worked to ensure a democratic process, with the Parish Council being involved.

Who are involved?

People are involved in different ways, there a core group of people, like Roy Alexander, Garry and Tracey who deal with most of the enquiries. There are about 20 people who are very active volunteers, with a further 20 who are half as active. The Parish Council is very supportive and consists of 9 further individuals. The School is very supportive with the Headteacher getting involved with the project.

What support has been accessed? (Financial and advisory)

Garry spoke to Defra, EST and local Council, a number of local businesses have donated wine etc for launch, with some making donations totaling about £10k. Defra awarded the group a grant of £26.5k to support the communication activities of the project and to engage with other communities. A number of companies have said they will do things like energy surveys but some of the group are wary that they are just trying to hang onto the coat tails of the publicity the concept of a carbon neutral village has created. Other local businesses have provided time in-kind, particularly local company called M+M Communications, who have produced all the groups publicity materials, posters, newsletters etc at no cost, which has been really valuable. Garry's company has put in a lot of time and services into the project also (RSK Carbon Management and TES). Green insurance companies have contacted the group for their participation in discussion forums; they have paid small donations to the project for residents' time with these survey forums.

Appendix 3

Organisations that provide advice/training to support community energy projects:

Government

CAfE programme funded by The Energy Saving Trust
Energy Saving Centres
Every Action Counts
Defra
London Energy Partnership

Private sector (utilities)

E.ON – SOURCE Fund – funding for small scale renewable projects
EDF Green Energy Fund – funding for small scale energy projects
Highlands & Islands Enterprise Company

Charities

Climate Outreach and Information Network
Marches Energy Agency
TAG 4 Sustainability
Community Energy Plus
National Energy Foundation
Centre for Alternative Technology

Friends of the Earth
Stop Climate Chaos
Community Energy Solutions
Renewable Energy Investment Club

Social Enterprise

Energy4All
Community Renewable Energy (CoRE)
Community Energy Solutions (CIC)

By interest area:

Energy Efficiency

Association for the Conservation of Energy
Combined Heat and Power Association
Energy efficiency and Best Practice Programme
Energy Saving Trust
Low Energy Lightbulbs
Practical Help (for Local Authorities)
The Little Pledge - save a little energy to help make a difference
Energy Efficient Homes Articles
Wasteless Society

Renewable Energy

British Biogen
British Photovoltaic Association
British Wind Energy Association (BWEA)
BWEA advice page on small wind systems
Fuel Cell 2000 - the on-line fuel cell information resource
Holsworthy Anaerobic Digestion plant
Hydrogen Now
International Geothermal Association
Marine Power info page (BWEA)
National Energy Foundation Logpile website - wood pellet boilers
Renewable Power Association
Fuel Cell Markets

Fuel Poverty

Centre for Sustainable Energy
EAGA Partnership
National Energy Action

Climate Change

Environmental Change Institute
Friends of the Earth Energy and Climate page
Global Climate Change Information Centre
State of the Cornish Environment Report
World Wildlife Fund Climate Change Campaign
Rainforest Site - Save carbon every day for free by clicking on the site - sponsors donate money towards preserving endangered rainforests.

Public awareness campaign organisations

Campaign against Climate Change
Stop Climate Chaos
I-Count
Friends of the Earth
Greenpeace

People and Planet
Green Party
Global Resistance
Christian Ecology Link
The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and the Environmental Sciences
London Islamic Network for the Environment
RisingTide
Save Our World
Climate Outreach and Information Network
'Roadblock'
Artists Project Earth
NESTA – The Big Green Challenge (competition)

Media Interest and Support

The Guardian – incl. 'Tread Lightly' initiative and special commentators including George Monbiot and Mark Lynas.

Self-help

Projects also support each other in providing telephone support and advice and through visits. The people involved with existing successful and high profile projects, such as 'Going Carbon Neutral Ashton Hayes' have many demands on their time to share their experience and knowledge of setting up and developing their project. Other projects (such as in the case of FREE) are being approached by very local communities, who have heard what they are doing and face similar challenges and want to learn from their neighbour's experiences.

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