
THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY BASED ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROJECTS:

**Report to the Energy Efficiency
Partnership for Homes**

Summary for Community Organisations

CAG Consultants, March 2004

Energy
Efficiency
Partnership
for Homes

1. Introduction

The Energy Saving Trust (EST) – on behalf of the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes¹ - commissioned independent research with the aim of establishing the benefits of adopting a community based approach to energy issues. A full report has been prepared outlining in detail the research and the overall conclusions and is available from the EST. This report summarises the main findings of the research

2. Defining Community Sustainable Energy Projects

A **Community Sustainable Energy Project (CSEP)** can be defined as one that is:

- Focused on one or more distinct communities (these can be based on geography, faith, ethnicity, age, interest)
- Puts the local people and community at the heart of its work and benefits them in terms of energy improvements and other economic, social and environmental gains
- Involves other stakeholders as appropriate and ensures effective partnership working to maximise energy and non-energy benefits for local people
- Leads to wider benefits for local people in terms of employment, health, regeneration, income, capacity-building, local environmental quality

3. The Added Value of Adopting a Community Based Approach

Drawing on the evidence assembled from the various projects evaluated for the research, six main benefits of adopting a community-based approach were identified. Full information on the individual projects referred to can be found in the main report to the EST. However, these benefits can be summarised as:

a. Home energy conservation work can be effectively linked to other improvements

The case studies and other projects highlighted a number of instances where improvements in insulation or home energy efficiency have been linked to other work that has enhanced the property. Through providing a complete package of such work disruption is minimised and the overall costs are lowered. Specific examples of this included:

- **Awel Aman Tawe** where sustainable energy work has served as a catalyst for more general community renewal

¹ The Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes is an independent network of over 250 organisations working together to promote energy efficiency and combat fuel poverty. The Partnership is facilitated by the Energy Saving Trust and funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

b. Community Based Sustainable Energy projects can help re-establish a sense of Community and care for the most vulnerable

Those running a number of the projects evaluated felt that a significant contribution of their work had been to improve the sense of community in an area and enhance the bonds between people, through, for example, creating opportunities for marginalised young people and bringing them into contact with elderly home-owners.

- **OPEN** has drawn on the significant skills base of older people and encouraged them to become active again within their community. Such projects enable people to help give something back to others in their neighbourhood and also give the individuals concerned a new sense of purpose

c. Community based work is particularly effective at addressing the needs of Marginalised Groups

The evidence of the last few years is that, while enormous improvements in the average energy performance of many homes have been achieved, certain groups have been passed over by some mainstream energy programmes. The research shows that some groups in the community e.g. the young, minority ethnic communities or those leaving care were perceived as being less easily persuaded as to the benefits of energy conservation work

Community based energy projects have been able to address this issue through the design and implementation of programmes tailored to the needs of specific sections of the community. For example:

- **Take Control** has considered the specific needs of those with limited literacy skills
- **Bright Green Savers** has produced promotional materials in Bengali to help raise awareness among the large Bangladeshi community in the area

d. Partnership working, if properly managed, helps add value to the project as a whole and to individual partners

Many of the projects featured in the report have been built on collaborative working between a number of organisations. The evidence is that this has enhanced the performance of the projects and organisations in a number of ways:

Better working within organisations – projects have, through making the links between energy issues and other aspects of the work of a Local Authority or Health Trust, helped encourage new partnerships and cross-departmental working within organisations

- **The Energy Care Network** has, through the involvement of different departments of Local Authorities, fostered a closer working relationship and integration between different services

Improving the effectiveness of individual staff – community projects that seek to train staff in other organisations to address fuel poverty contribute to the performance of a more integrated and effective service by those staff:

- **The Energy Care Network**, through training social and health workers about energy issues, has enabled them to deliver a more integrated and effective service to their clients.

Pooling financial resources – Another crucial element of partnership working on energy issues has been to draw together different funding streams to help deliver a significantly larger budget for energy improvements than would otherwise have been the case. The examples outlined in this report have shown Single Regeneration Budget, New Deal and European funding all being utilised in this way.

- **Ecodyfi** has drawn together a wide variety of funding sources, creating a significant new budget to be used for projects that benefit the community

Utilising the knowledge and expertise of those in the area -projects have demonstrated that there are significant numbers of people in every community who are either actively involved in action to improve their area or who would like to contribute. By tapping in to this potential, and convincing key community activists that energy issues should be an important element of their work, a far larger number of people in an area can be contacted than would otherwise be the case.

- **Older Persons Energy Network** highlighted the need to recognise the skills and experience of volunteers and ensure that such people are given a level of respect and responsibility commensurate with their experience

e. Building local awareness of energy and fuel poverty issues can help promote long term awareness and behavioural change relating to energy issues

There is much evidence from the community projects evaluated that face-to-face discussions and awareness raising, and the involvement of people in energy projects, can lead to longer term behavioural change, helping to reduce energy use in the longer term.

- **The Dundee Community Energy Project** has found that many in the community can, through a change of circumstance, slip back into fuel poverty. Increasing their awareness of the help that is available ensures that uptake of grants can continue after projects have ceased to operate

f. Community involved in projects can develop skills that can lead to wider skills development

Many CSEPs have helped provide the local people involved with a range of new skills and areas of expertise. These new skills have been diverse, including project management, finance and budgetting, law, awareness of funding streams, team-working or personnel management. All such skills are extremely important in helping build the long-term ability of communities to look after their own affairs, and are likely

to help contribute to the effective running of future community based ventures in energy and non-energy work.:

- **Working Herts** has helped many of the young people involved in the scheme to go on to further training and personal development, inspired by the confidence given to them by the project

4. Conclusions

Despite the great diversity of CSEPs in terms of the issues they address, their scale, their structure and partner involvement and their methodology, it is apparent from those consulted as part of this research that three more general conclusions can be made about the benefits of Community-Based Sustainable Energy Projects:

a. A Community Based Approach can assist in effective project delivery

The evaluation of the projects highlighted in this report has demonstrated a number of ways in which work at the community level can promote effective project delivery. Together these amount to a significant set of advantages that a community based approach offers over alternatives.

b. The Community Based Approach is likely to become more necessary in coming years

It is likely that demand for such an approach will grow over the coming years, particularly given the stringent new targets being set for energy utilities through the next Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC2) and the need for many Local Authorities to make further progress towards their HECA targets. Both these factors, matched by the fact that much of the most easily accessible housing stock has already been fitted with insulation and other energy conservation measures, is likely to necessitate action to tackle the fuel poverty of 'hard to reach' groups. A wider adoption some of the approaches highlighted by the community projects analysed for this report would seem an obvious means of achieving this aim.

Another mechanism through which community energy work could be significantly expanded in the future is through Community Planning, Local Strategic Partnerships/Community Planning Partnerships and other mechanisms through which Local Authorities are encouraged to adopt a community leadership role and enter into partnerships to promote the 'Well-being' of their community. Examples of where this has occurred are highlighted in the recent *Guidance on the Role of Community Partnerships in Sustainable Energy Issues* report prepared for the EST.

c. Despite the variety of CSEPs, there are common factors that can be replicated by all such projects

The projects evaluated for this research serve to highlight the great variety of sustainable energy work being undertaken in communities across the UK. Each of the projects has come into being by a different route, whether it be due to action by local people or an initiative developed by another stakeholder such as the Local

Authority, an energy utility or a Neighbourhood Renewal body. The overall approach taken also varies significantly, in terms of management structure, community engagement and outcomes. However, certain common success factors can be identified, and should be taken on board by all individuals and organisations seeking to promote energy conservation and sustainable energy in their area. These factors are

- The community must be at the heart of any locally based work. Where possible and practical, the community should be consulted before the project is established and involved in project management. Where this is not a realistic aim (for example where the capacity is not available in the community) then the project should still be designed to respond to the needs of all those the project serves. Rooting a project within a community, as the examples in this report demonstrate, can harness and build on the enthusiasm of local people
- Projects need to be of an appropriate scale and have a clearly defined purpose and strategy
- Projects should avoid excessive bureaucracy and have a clear management structure. While there is no one framework that is appropriate for all projects, it is vital that the *right* framework is employed. The EST's CAfE network can advise community organisations on this
- Providing a high quality service that responds to individual needs ensures that project aims are more effectively delivered.
- It can take a significant amount of time to build awareness of a project and short-term and temporary approaches are unlikely to bear fruit. From the start, it should be ensured that adequate funding and resources are in place
- Project managers need to ensure that all staff, and particularly frontline staff or volunteers, are offered decent working conditions and an appropriate level of support

In conclusion, community-based sustainable energy projects have helped deliver a broad range of benefits to the communities in which they have operated. If properly supported and structured they can help deliver a much more significant element of action to tackle Fuel Poverty, profligate energy use and climate change, while at the same time as delivering a wider set of benefits.

There is enormous potential for far greater work at the community level around sustainable energy. As this summary report illustrates, the benefits of CSEPS, to the community, to the organisations and individuals involved, and to wider society, can be very significant indeed. With the support offered to community organisations by the EST and others, there is greater potential than ever for the delivery of sustainable energy solutions at the local level.