

COMMUNITIES LIVING SUSTAINABLY: ENERGY LEARNING SUMMARY

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About Communities Living Sustainably

Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) is a £12 million programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Twelve communities in England have received up to £1million to help deal with the potential impact of climate change and live in a more sustainable and resilient way. The programme will run for five years, with these communities sharing their experiences and providing inspiration to other communities across England.

The Groundwork UK Learning Partnership

The Groundwork UK Learning Partnership is made up of five organisations each with expertise in tackling climate change and helping communities to live more sustainably. This partnership has been brought together to encourage and support the communities to capture and share any learning from their projects. The partnership comprises Groundwork UK, The Energy Saving Trust, The Federation of City Farms and Gardens, The New Economics Foundation and Building Research Establishment (BRE).

Key Findings

This learning summary shares information about the work CLS projects have carried out around energy up until November 2014.

Encouraging behaviour change

Providing energy surgeries and advice in public places coupled with home visits from professional advisors is an effective way of influencing behaviour around home energy use. Peer to peer support also has a role to play.

What are we learning?

- It can be difficult to engage the public in conversations about energy. Taking conversations to places where people already gather such as clubs, support groups and events results in a more positive response. This approach is helping to build relationships with individuals and progress follow up work including home visits, the installation of energy saving measures and the opportunity to track progress on energy saving pledges.
- Following up with home energy visits by energy and home improvement professionals is effective. This enables better management of the advice given and transfers the responsibility for issues such as health and safety to organisations with experience.
- Peer to peer mentoring also has a role to play. CLS projects are supporting local people to work together to encourage each other to move towards more sustainable lifestyles.

Case Study: L8 Living Sustainably, Liverpool. L8 Living Sustainably has recruited 15 volunteer Energy Champions to attend events, giving advice on how to make homes more energy secure. The champions are trained in listening skills and are recruited from different ethnic groups, enabling the project to reach across the community and access relevant support organisations. The project believes ‘the approach of local people supporting local people works – once people are engaged with the topic by a good communicator, they are much more likely to act.’

Engaging with local renewable energy strategies

CLS projects are involving local people to make informed decisions about where and how they think renewable energy could be developed where they live. They are working directly on building consensus and developing energy cooperatives or trusts better able to represent communities in future discussions around low carbon infrastructure in their area.

What are we learning?

- Broad local partnerships that involve local authorities working in partnership with communities and the private sector are well suited to progressing a strategic approach to renewable energy.
- Communities want to play an important role in decision making around low carbon infrastructure but they must be involved early in the process to build consensus about renewable energy.

Case Study: Sustainable Sheppey. The Sustainable Sheppey project are working with local people to identify the most appropriate way of developing renewable energy on the island. A drop in session and three workshops were held with community members. User friendly resources were produced to help the community make informed decisions about future renewable energy projects. A community energy trust has been established to generate community benefit directly from their own projects and from larger scale commercial renewable energy schemes on the island.

Increasing resilience and progressing community renewable projects. Several approaches to developing community renewable energy are emerging from projects including development of a portfolio of PV projects, community energy investment funds and single community renewable energy installations.

What are we learning?

- CLS is providing crucial support through the early stages of community renewable energy projects, before an investable business plan is in place.
- Understanding the different funding mechanisms (including community benefit from commercial developments, local share ownership, social finance and grants for renewable energy projects) is difficult and communities require support with this.
- Legal issues can also be complex and local authorities can offer important support to progress issues such as roof rental agreements etc.

Case Study: CLS in Dorset. The project has established 'Dorset Community Energy' a new community energy co-operative and is aiming to deliver six solar installations on local schools and village halls. The average size of the systems being investigated is 15kw. A finance package is being developed for the scheme which will include a loan to cover the initial capital and a community share issue will enable local people to own a share in the project. The benefits from the scheme will be shared between the host schools and the community. The schools' electricity bills will be lower during the day when they are using electricity generated by the solar PV. Dorset Community Energy will own the systems and receive income for any electricity sold back to the grid and from the Feed in Tariff subsidy scheme with its profits going back into its social aims to deliver local sustainability projects.

