

# Green Communities Case Study

## Cockermouth School Eco Centre



Cockermouth School is an ordinary school doing extraordinary things. Protecting the environment is part of the Cumbrian comprehensive's ethos.



In 2006 the school showed their commitment by opening an Eco Centre. It's used to teach pupils and the rest of the town about the environment. The building itself is totally sustainable and costs nothing to run.

It has taken nearly 10 years of hard work to get the centre up and running. So how has Cockermouth School done it?

### Cockermouth School Eco Centre and the Energy Saving Trust

The Energy Saving Trust communities programme gave the school lots of useful advice on setting up the Eco Centre.

Just as the project was getting off the ground, development manager Joan Ellis

approached the Energy Saving Trust's community programme for guidance on how to make the building environmentally friendly.

'The Energy Saving Trust gave me lots of good information that made me feel more confident,' says Joan. 'They gave me knowledge about the technical side of saving energy, so I could work with the architect.'

Joan learned about solar power and ground source heat pumps, which draw warmth from the ground to heat water. 'When the architect recommended them, the knowledge I had gained from The Energy Saving Trust helped me go along with that decision,' she says.

Joan also went on a training course when she was struggling to find funding to do an initial study into how feasible it would be to build the Eco Centre. She says: 'That was a crucial time for the project, and the course really gave me encouragement. It's good to have your motivations reinforced and to know you aren't alone.'

### Cockermouth School Eco Centre's achievements

The Eco Centre is a fantastic accomplishment for Cockermouth School. It's built into a bank, with a sedum (grass) roof. It has a large auditorium and 10 pods

where smaller groups can work. There are also four 'biomes' – spaces built to replicate different ecosystems, including Mediterranean, arid and Lakeland climates.

The building is completely sustainable and costs nothing to run. The centre gets its energy from ground source heat pumps, solar panels and a wind turbine. It's also very well insulated. In fact, the centre produces more energy than it needs, so the surplus is used by the main school. The building also has passive ventilation, which uses no energy.

The centre was built in the most environmentally friendly way possible too. Its bricks came from a demolished building and the paving stones from an old cinema. The insulation used is made from sheep's wool and its wood comes from local sustainable sources.

These efforts haven't gone unnoticed. In 2008 the school won Eco School status. It was also the first school in Cumbria to win a Green Flag for its environmental performance.

These great end results have only been achieved after years of work. The idea for the Eco Centre was first floated in the late 1990s. There was an initial consultation meeting where pupils, teachers and the rest of the community were asked for their ideas and opinions. A community steering group for the project was then set up. As the project developed, Joan Ellis made sure the community was kept informed, with articles in the local press and more public meetings.

Funding for the project was the next hurdle. First of all, they had to do a study

to look into whether the project would be viable and how much it would cost. The Rural Development Commission and the National Lottery gave them £10,000 for this. The Department of Education and Skills provided the £1.3 million needed to build the centre.

Joan is convinced that the Eco Centre has helped encourage Cockermouth to be more energy efficient. She says: 'We've seen stories in the local papers about people installing wind turbines or people recycling and reusing their water. I'm sure it's not just coincidence. The Eco Centre has had an influence on the community and you do see changes and people making an effort.'

## The future for Cockermouth School Eco Centre

The school is planning to run an Eco conference. They're inviting the 13 schools in the West Cumbria area to come along and find how they can improve their schools' environmental performance.

## Contact information

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