



centre for
sustainable
energy

Our purpose, methods & values

(including our strategic high level
objectives)



Our purpose, methods & values

This document aims to describe in one place what we are trying to achieve as a charity, the changes we are therefore seeking in society, and why and how we do the things we do to help realise these changes. It seeks to articulate what we might call our 'method'.

It draws on discussions amongst Trustees and senior staff, stimulated by a draft internal document. It is structured as follows:

- Our vision and purpose: the change we want (and why)
- Our methods: what we do to bring about change (and why)
- Our values, principles and tenets – how we seek change

We have also included a final section outlining the five high level objectives for our 3-year strategy which emerged out of the same process.

In pulling this document together, the intention is to make explicit what may have been more implicit in the past – unspoken assumptions which get applied in our work or tacit implications of positions we readily take. By articulating these issues and then examining them together, we can potentially develop a stronger shared sense of purpose and common understanding of our approaches to securing change.

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Our vision and purpose: the change we want (and why)

The Centre for Sustainable Energy is in the business of societal change. Our vision is a world where sustainability is second nature, carbon emissions have been cut to safe levels and fuel poverty has been replaced by energy justice. All our work is ultimately dedicated to achieving this positive vision. It's what we mean by 'sustainable energy' and it's why we exist.

The classical definition of 'sustainable' applies in this context: that current generations are able to meet their needs (such as for warmth in winter as an energy-related need) in ways which don't compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

This definition embeds both: (a) a requirement to meet current and future energy needs in ways which avoid dangerous climate change and other lasting environmental risks or financial liabilities which would burden future generations, and; (b) a focus on ensuring those currently unable to meet their energy needs secure the resources and access they require to do so.

These are hugely challenging goals – globally and in the UK where our work is focused. They require the UK to reduce its collective carbon emissions to virtually zero in the next 30 years and to put an end to fuel poverty within the next 10 years.

Or to put it another way:

- We believe we owe it to current and future generations for the UK to reduce our collective carbon emissions rapidly to virtually zero.
- We think that being able to afford to keep healthily warm in winter is a basic right for every household which should be both upheld and realised in practice.

¹ We focus our work on the UK because there's plenty of work to do here and because it's where our understanding and experience has most to offer – and because we believe that solutions ultimately need to be grounded in the culture and social setting in which they need to take effect, thus requiring local know-how and relationships to drive their design and adoption.

The technological challenges in realising our vision

In broad terms, these goals mean we need to see a wholesale shift to renewable energy sources which rely on harnessing natural flows of energy and thus minimise the carbon emissions and other long-term environmental and financial liabilities associated with sourcing, generating and using energy.

In making this shift we must both manage the costs of this transition and reliably meet energy needs. That means addressing the fact that renewable energy sources are diffuse and variable. This requires significant reductions in demand for energy and much smarter initiatives to shift demand and store supply to keep demand and supply in balance and make best use of renewable energy sources.

This will require huge improvements in the energy performance of our buildings, industrial processes and energy using equipment and will almost certainly require the establishment of new, more modest norms for how we use energy (and how much of it we use) in our daily lives.

Addressing fuel poverty also requires a significant improvement in the energy performance of the homes of people on lower incomes, thus directly tackling one of fuel poverty's principal causes by reducing the amount of energy required to keep adequately warm.

The non-technological challenges in realising our vision

But these are largely technological statements about what needs to change to deliver sustainability in the energy system.

In technical terms, the energy system comprises: the sources of energy and their supply chains, the networks for distributing them, the energy using equipment and the physical infrastructure (such as buildings) which determine the amount of energy required to deliver the energy services we need (such as warmth, illumination, refrigeration, process heat, computing power etc).

However, the energy system is a socio-technical system, meaning that its technical features are shaped by wider social processes and practices and by economic factors. These and their associated individual, household and

organisational behaviours, far more than energy-related technical considerations, determine levels and patterns of demand for energy and technological and system configuration choices.

The real challenges for us in trying to deliver sustainable energy therefore lie far less in what needs to happen technologically than in what needs to happen politically, commercially, socially and culturally to enable this transition to take place.

This is a hugely complex web of inter-relating influences and drivers. Some of them – such as the extent of centralisation in our power system and its grid designed in the 1950s and 60s for ‘coal by wire’ or the building construction techniques applied in the 1900s (and since) or the ‘competitive-markets-first-and-foremost’ zealotry since the 1980s – have been burning slowly and set a lasting legacy. These create significant inertia in the system’s capacity for rapid change. Others, such as digitalisation, the growth of wifi and improvement in data capture and analytics, emerge outside the energy system with potential for huge disruption to existing markets and practices within it.

Our starting point for change

So where do we start to change this? In keeping with our roots in the 1970s appropriate technology movement we start with people.

We believe that sustainable energy can only be achieved through the active engagement, involvement, action and consent of people as consumers, citizens and members of many communities (from neighbourhoods to workplaces to networks of shared interests).

This is because the shift to a sustainable energy system ultimately requires everyone to:

- Alter their individual and collective energy using behaviours and habits.
- Invest, purchase and spend differently.
- Give consent for changes in the buildings and landscapes where they live and work and in the markets in which they participate and in the services they receive.
- Pay for many aspects of this transition through their bills and taxes.

In our experience, people are more likely to make these changes and give this consent (what we’ve been calling ‘meaningful public consent’) if (a) they have been informed about and involved in the changes and (b) the solutions on offer appear fair in terms of how the benefits and burdens of change are distributed between people and over time (intra and inter-generational equity, or what we have been calling ‘energy justice’).

That means, in the first instance, working directly with individuals to engage them and help them make changes. However, we recognise that the interests and

actions of individuals (and the choices available to them) are principally shaped by social and cultural processes and practices, local conditions, market structures and processes, policies and regulations. So to maximise our impact and deliver on our mission we need to address these too.

We can define six different ways – or methods – in which we can have impact in relation to securing the societal changes we seek. These are described below. While there will always be questions to explore about the balance between these different approaches in our work, we consider them each vital and highly complementary components of our overall method as an organisation.

Each of these methods is potentially applicable in any of our work. For example, there is a policy dimension to advising individuals and there are tools which can help us support the action of others more effectively. Simply articulating the methods here, we hope we can think more clearly and readily about how these different methods can work together to achieve our goals and what combinations would maximise our impact.

Of course, at any given time, the extent and quality of our work associated with each method may be less than we would want. Describing these methods here provides an opportunity to consider strategically these questions – of balance, extent and quality – across our strategic objectives and explore what we want or need to change in our practices and development priorities to have greater impact.



Our methods: what we do to bring about change

a. Engaging and empowering individuals to act

Approach: Through the provision of information, advice, coaching and advocacy, we directly support individual households to make changes in relation to their energy use. We look to improve their capacity to act and make good choices on their own account and increase their resilience to future challenges. For vulnerable households we often work in partnership with others who can help us address the causes of a household's energy-related vulnerabilities.

Impact: Our direct impact is through the action then taken by (or on behalf of) individuals to realise more sustainable energy outcomes in their own homes and more widely and the growth in their capacity to act in future. By engaging with households directly, we have an opportunity to witness and reveal the real needs which have to be met to deliver improvements. This enables us to refine and improve our own practice and inform that of others. In addition, by encountering on a daily basis households' lived experiences of the energy system and its associated policies, markets and programmes, we can see the impacts of these influences 'on the ground' and potentially understand what is and isn't working and the opportunities for (and challenges of) systemic improvement.

b. Supporting others to act

Approach: Supporting motivated individuals and groups to engage others and/or take sustainable energy action within their own spheres of influence (such as their communities, businesses, organisations, supply chains etc), particularly in ways which disrupt or subvert currently dominant unsustainable practices and market structures.

Impact: This approach seeds more sustainable action than we could achieve directly. By applying our best knowledge in the support we offer, we help to ensure that those initiatives have a higher chance of success. The approach also helps to make visible to more people the opportunities for things to be done and organised differently or better.

c. Developing practices to bring people together to explore sustainable energy

Approach: Designing and promoting collective processes and practices which bring people together to explore sustainable energy in ways which shift social norms (to make sustainable energy more 'normal') and engage and motivate the previously uninterested. This can give voice to their interests, create a sense of shared purpose and agency that they can achieve change directly, and build meaningful public consent for changes proposed by others.

Impact: This approach builds understanding and a sense of agency and purpose across a wide range of communities which makes them more likely to develop their own sustainable energy activities and to engage positively with changes proposed by others (on the right terms). Over time, we hope/believe this approach will also create a more positive and supportive social/political context for the changes which are needed.

d. Building understanding and learning lessons

Approach: Researching and analysing (a) current and proposed practice and policy interventions and (b) the experiences of people trying to act (or simply survive) within the energy system reveals what is and isn't working (or will or won't work) and how it could be improved.

Impact: By sharing the findings of this research and analysis with policy-makers, policy-shapers and existing and future practitioners – and highlighting their implications for future policy and practice – we enable better practice by current and new actors and better policy-making.

e. Making tools and models which enable others to improve policy and practice

Approach: Building and making widely available analytical tools and models which (a) enable better insights by existing and potential actors into how to achieve sustainable energy outcomes and (b) help to lower the costs of action.

Impact: Decent tools and models readily shared can make sustainable energy actions and outcomes more obvious, easier to understand, and cheaper to achieve, thus making them more likely to happen – and be more appropriate and effective when they do.

f. Influencing policy, regulation and programme design

Approach: Engaging with policy-making, regulation-defining, market-rule-setting and programme-designing processes, particularly at national level, in an effort to re-shape the overall context in which everyone ultimately acts. In doing so, we recognise that policy will only change if policy-makers feel they have – or can build – sufficient political/societal consent for the solutions on offer (see c. above).

Impact: Better policies, regulations, market rules and delivery programmes make for faster, deeper change because they make taking action for sustainable energy by individuals and organisations easier and more effective. In addition, having this policy awareness ensures that all our work can be routinely set in a 'bigger picture' and thus has the potential to respond quickly to new policies and national initiatives.

Our values, principles and tenets – how we seek change

How we apply these different approaches – how we do our work – is informed by what could best be described as an assortment of values, principles or tenets.

These have emerged over the years through practical experience and insight regarding how we find we can have impact and influence. Some of these have been explicitly articulated before, in our brand statement or in previous strategy statements. Our aim should be that these should be (a) clearly articulated – and discussed and tested regularly – and (b) common to all of our work.

At high level, these values are captured in our ‘brand statement’:

At CSE we find solutions which reflect how people think about and use energy as well as how the technology works.

We analyse and understand the bigger picture so that our work is relevant and focused on real needs.

We guarantee that what we say will be based on sound research and practical experience.

And we’ll be frank about what we’ve found that does and doesn’t work.

That way, you can navigate the options, avoid our mistakes, and take action more effectively.

This brand statement is a tightly focused guide for how we want our brand to come across to others and it captures three of our core tenets:

*People AND Technology
Big picture – plus practical detail
Candid advice on what works*

In addition, there are a few more ‘values, principles or tenets’ beyond these three which we seek to apply in our work. These are outlined below in no particular order, with a short explanation of why they matter and how they might influence our work.

i. Having local roots matters when it comes to supporting individual households – we believe that providing advice, coaching and advocacy on sustainable energy for households is best done by people with knowledge of the area where those households live and relationships with other local organisations providing associated services. This is why, for example, we look to support others to provide advice services in their locality and broadly keep our advice work to a geographical domain where we have familiarity and connections.

ii. Our role is to break new ground, moving on as new provision emerges – as a charity with a mission which seeks change with limited resources, we should be regularly reviewing the work we’re doing to test:

- a. whether we’re keeping our focus on what are, at that moment or in the near future, the most significant barriers to better outcomes, and;
- b. whether other organisations – be they ‘mainstream’ (such as energy suppliers) or social or charitable enterprises – are now adequately providing services we had been seeking to encourage (often by example).

This is why, for example, we have shifted much of our focus in supporting community-level action on energy towards local energy planning and supporting action on low carbon retrofit and fuel poverty. Our view is that the community energy sector now has ready access to support on developing renewable energy projects from a range of organisations with more relevant expertise than us.

iii. Sharing readily our knowledge, practical experience and data will amplify our impact – by making all of our work easily and, as much as possible, freely available and open to all, we create the potential for many others to build on our work to create their own positive impact. We will never have the resources to apply our ‘findings’ in every setting where they could have beneficial influence. And we do not have a monopoly on insights or analytical techniques to reveal new opportunities to facilitate action and/or improve policy and practice. This is why we make all our work available on our website and aim to disseminate it widely, take an ‘open data’ approach, and look to offer support readily to other organisations seeking to apply our learning or use our resources in their work.

iv. Do what's needed (and be pragmatic – rather than purist – in doing so) to help clients to achieve sustainable energy objectives. We use our insights into the client's needs (rather than pre-defined project outputs) to determine our course of action in any situation with the aim of meeting those needs as fully as possible. This requires us to understand how the different clients and audiences across our work think and act around energy (their 'lived experience'), what motivates them and how best to communicate and/or intervene to spark their interest and secure their action. We look to take a pragmatic approach – with a stronger initial interest in securing the intended action than worrying about whether it was taken for what we might consider the 'right reasons'. That said, we should look to help people over time develop their sense of how the actions they have taken fit with wider efforts towards sustainable energy – and how that 'fit' could stimulate them to further action and commitment.

v. Focusing on causes more than symptoms creates more lasting change – tackling fuel poverty and cutting carbon emissions requires their causes to be addressed. However tempting it may be to do 'quick fixes' which address symptoms, these do not achieve long term change. That is why, for example we're more interested in helping people get their homes insulated (and lobbying government for more investment), building their capacity to navigate the energy market (and improving its approach to vulnerable households), and (often by working with others) improving their financial capabilities, than in giving out fuel vouchers to provide 'free energy' so the vulnerable can be warm for a few weeks. And it's why we seek to reduce energy demand rather than plant trees to offset carbon that has been emitted from energy use.

vi. We do energy rather than transport. While transport is a key sector to tackle in relation to climate change, our focus is the energy system that relates principally to energy supplied and used in buildings. This is because the expertise and knowledge required to tackle unsustainable transport practices and shift to sustainable transport are very different from those required in the energy sector. Where there are cross-overs which we think are priorities for us, we should look to work with appropriate experts who share our values (such as Sustrans). The advent of electric vehicles and their potential impacts (and possible benefits) for the electricity system is an emerging example of such a cross-over issue.

vii. Energy justice is a prerequisite for success. The costs and benefits of change should be fairly shared – what we have been calling 'energy justice' – not just for the sake of social justice but also to reinforce the sense of shared purpose we believe is a prerequisite for achieving lasting change. This covers both 'Distributional justice' (who emits/who pays/who benefits/who suffers from failure) ("Fair Shares") and 'Procedural justice' (who's involved (and how) in discussions and decisions about what happens and why and in whose interests) ("Fair Play").

Strategy

High level objectives

For our new 3 year strategy (2017-2019), we have identified and articulated five high level objectives that will provide the direction and focal points for our work over the next three years. Each describes a sustainable energy 'system state' we're trying to achieve en route to our vision. They summarise as:

1. No one suffers a cold home
2. Everyone empowered to take action and support sustainable energy
3. Every building low carbon and liveable
4. Places shaped for sustainable energy
5. A rapidly decarbonising energy system that works for everyone

These are described overleaf in more detail and explained in terms of why they matter to us and what they mean in the context of our work.



1. No one suffers a cold home

Being able to keep adequately, healthily warm in winter is a basic human need – and a fundamental component of sustainable energy. Our objective is to ensure that everyone can afford to keep their homes warm when they need to – by tackling the root causes of energy injustice in the UK: improving the poor housing energy performance (both building fabric and heating); addressing limited energy know-how; challenging poor supplier practices and market design; strengthening financial capabilities and incomes; exposing (and proposing alternatives to) inadequate and ill-considered policies and practices which (a) ignore co-benefits (such as health and wellbeing) and (b) load costs unduly onto the energy bills of vulnerable households. In doing so, we must make sure associated risks (like overheating in summer, indoor air pollution, damp and mould etc) are addressed and not exacerbated.

2. Everyone empowered to take action and support sustainable energy

The transition to a sustainable energy system requires the meaningful involvement and consent of the public in all its various guises, values and predilections. This is because achieving that transition will need more or less everyone to do the following.

- Alter their individual and collective energy using behaviours and habits.
- Invest, purchase and spend differently.
- Give consent for changes in the buildings and landscapes where they live and work, in the markets in which they participate and in the services they receive.
- Pay for many aspects of the transition through their bills and taxes.

Our objective is to stimulate this involvement and consent through our interactions with people – as consumers, citizens and members of many communities (from neighbourhoods to workplaces to networks of shared interests). That means understanding the differences between people and developing new and varied types of conversations and interventions to engage ‘on their terms’, build a realistic sense of individual and collective agency (which reflects people’s circumstances), motivate and enable sustainable energy action, and expose policies and practices which obstruct positive initiative and undermine public trust in and consent for the necessary transformation.

3. Every building low carbon and liveable

Meeting the UK’s moral and legal obligations to cut carbon emissions to safe levels will require more or less every building – both existing and new – and all the energy-using appliances and equipment in them to deliver exceptional energy performance and use near zero carbon energy within about 15 years. This means massive growth in the scale and rate of energy retrofit of existing buildings, a huge improvement in heating system performance, upgrades to appliance efficiency standards and the decarbonisation of the fuel or power providing heating. And it will require all new buildings to be designed and built to zero carbon standards. These improvements also need to reflect the need for buildings, whatever their purpose, to be ‘liveable’ – including providing controllability for occupants and not overheating in summer – and to respect the structural and aesthetic integrity of our most valuable built heritage.

4. Places shaped for sustainable energy

Realising sustainable energy goals (like decarbonisation, affordability, reliability) will result in changes everywhere – to our buildings and neighbourhoods, our local landscapes – and for everyone. Nowhere and no one gets an ‘opt out’. But ultimately these goals will only be achieved if people are involved and give their consent (so that politicians feel able to put policies and funded programmes in place and initiative-takers have license to take action). And that consent is only likely to emerge if the way in which sustainable energy is planned and delivered to meet those societal goals reflects local conditions and opportunities and respects what people value about the places they live and work. This requires processes to shape places and plans for change which are involving, put sustainable energy at their heart, give voice to a wide range of people and offer them a genuine stake in, and influence over, the resulting initiatives.

[Note that this is different from (but overlaps with/is nested within) 2 above in that it focuses on ‘place’ and the processes by which planning for sustainable energy takes place effectively and with the involvement of the public.]

5. A rapidly decarbonising energy system that works for everyone

To be truly sustainable, the way we meet our needs for energy services (like warmth, illumination, process heat, motive and computing power) in future has to happen with virtually no carbon emissions. Achieving this requires a transformation of the current energy system – a wholesale shift to renewable sources (and the associated smart system management of demand and storage to accommodate their variability), a step change in the energy performance of our buildings and energy using appliances and equipment, and a shift in expectations about what constitutes a reasonable level of energy services. This transformation must achieve all of these outcomes while also reflecting the social justice concerns at the heart of sustainable energy (not least to maintain public support). That means policies, regulations, market rules, and associated programmes which distribute their costs and benefits fairly and provide for access for, and participation by all, with appropriate support and protection for more vulnerable people.