

‘Capturings’ from ‘Thinking out loud’

At our recent conference, *‘Shaping a local sustainable energy future: the next steps’* we posed three questions for delegates to answer during the lunch break. We called this exercise ‘thinking out loud’.

Scores of answers were received in a flurry of post-it notes, almost all of which are reproduced below. They are an eclectic mix offered up here without selection or comment in a spirit of openness. We believe they provide an interesting snapshot of the views of nearly 200 delegates with significant collective knowledge and experience in local sustainable energy policy and practice.



Q1

What do we need to do NOW to make sure tomorrow is different from today (and in the right way)?

‘Stop thinking general government knows what it’s doing, localise.’

‘Change from being mindful of me to being mindful of our neighbours – near and far.’

‘Do more research.’

‘First measure – increase energy efficiency in old homes and minimum standards for new ones.’

‘Stop relying on the same model of growth we have been dependent on. We need to change our ways of thinking.’

‘Stop talking about the devastating impacts etc – it paralyses people. Start a positive movement linked to future lifestyles that doesn’t talk about environment alone.’

‘Introduce road taxes and congestion charges and use the money to improve public transport. Make supermarkets more accountable for waste/recycling and what we consume.’

‘More funding for retrofit projects.’

‘Have a utopian vision of a sustainable community and work towards it.’

‘Improve environmental communications – develop expertise in social marketing.’

‘Recognise that people are motivated by self-interest. Tap into that motivation but shape it through legislation so it is philanthropic. Encourage social entrepreneurs.’

‘Start doing things, try different things and see how they go then learn lessons.’

‘Make individuals responsible (financially – sticks and carrots) for their actions that impact on our environment.’



‘Work together, share ideas, stop competing so much – we all want more or less the same thing and are more likely to achieve it together.’

‘More joined up working and mutual learning particularly between energy agencies.’

‘Vote for change nationally and locally.’

‘Clear solutions identified and implemented in a progressive, just way.’

‘Invest far more in local public transport and subsidise it.’

‘Make the case for community energy as a benefit, rather than boring (and possibly expensive) alternative. Find other community initiatives that can dovetail with the energy sector.’

‘Lobby to more government legislation on personal carbon limits.’

‘Make sustainable lifestyles sexy and attractive.’

‘Stop talking and act now!’

‘Invest far more in retro-fitting existing housing stock.’

'Reform price structures e.g. – raise taxes on fuel, reduce tax on owning cars, use block tariff for home energy with higher rates for luxury consumption.'

'Encourage young people go to university in their own home town. This would keep families together and build stronger communities. It would reduce the need for a lifetime of journeys made by families visiting each other.'

'Set targets for all central and local government departments to re-focus services to reduce carbon and dependency on oil. Express all governments budgets in cash and carbon-used to clearly show where the effort should be focused.'

'Provide leadership – having a clear vision and a group of followers.'

'Empower people – that what they do as individuals makes a difference.'

'Bold, well informed, ambitious strategies for change.'

'Education, both formally through schools but also as parents - teaching kids that consuming more won't make them happy.'

'Distribute funds locally, reduce centralised control.'

'Change our language to talk about what is important to house holders and communities.'

'Government to lead by example, go to schools and get the youngsters on board. Government be open about peak oil – keep people informed. Encourage local industry and recycling industries – stop supporting polluting industries.'

'We need to focus on the young – ensure the vision of a better tomorrow is inspiring, positive and attractive so that children and young people are finding it exciting becoming part of forming the future.'

'Be wary of big overarching schemes – smaller flexible local solutions needed.'



'Hold politicians to account at all levels – and support them when they try and do the right things.'

'Stop consulting so much and start leading more.'

'Keep fuel poverty and carbon saving completely separate and charge a higher council tax rate for un-insulated homes.'

'Make sure we educate and empower children. Engage youth in the issues and build up our communities by long term funding to empower local community activists and groups.'

'Stop making things worse: stop building runways, motorways, and make sure all coal/oil/gas-fired power stations are fitted with full carbon capture.'

'Link all our future challenges with ways of improving sense of community, mutual support, pleasant environment etc.'

'Use existing models of co-operative/social enterprise to empower community ownership in local energy initiatives, e.g. community shares to raise finance rather than grants.'

'Reflect the ecological cost in the price of projects and services.'

'Ration energy and carbon.'

'Future-proof properties for renewable technologies when doing energy efficiency works today i.e. leave hot water cylinder when installing condensing boiler ready for potential future installation of solar hot water panels.'

'Educate, raise awareness that what we choose today could impact for good on our children – force the elected members to pay attention.'

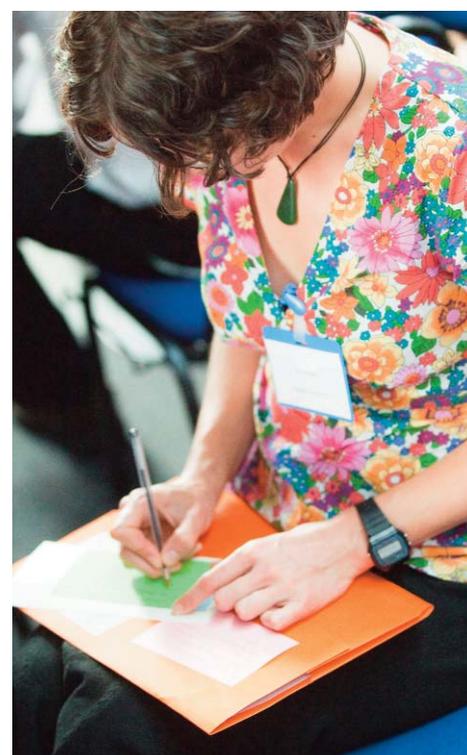
'Educate today's decision-makers so the right decisions are made for shaping tomorrow.'

'Make the best choices for the environment into the best choices economically.'

'Work more with young people, any families and schools – whose future are we going to protect or destroy.'

'Get funding for hard-to-treat homes – we are running out of standard lofts and cavity walls to insulate.'

'Align sustainable energy objectives with the real agenda of communities (and politicians) e.g. not gathering feed stock for biogas plant, but more efficient vermin-free rubbish collection.'



'Educate not just the policy-makers of today but the next generation of politicians, activists, CEO's and engineers. Awareness of overpopulation and climate change will help us tackle new problems today's schoolchildren will face later.'

'Align objectives more effectively and send out clear messages from central government.'

Increase land available for allotments – give every school a kitchen garden.'

'Cut child allowance for the 3rd child. Defer the age of driving to 21. Increase the tax on fuel by 1p per litre and invest the returns on green technology.'

'Get central government to prioritise sustainable energy measures to the same extent as they prioritise saving banks.'

Q2

How can we work together to learn each others' lessons and build better initiatives and better evidence?

'New statutory duties linked to finance packages for local authorities.'

'Use simple and exciting language, and share ideas and initiatives in a non-protective manner. Bring back the best practise from the rest of Europe and the world.'

'Use arts, digital media websites (including social networking) to capture and communicate evidence.'



'Involve non-academies in policy and implementation.'

'Develop real technical expertise rather than engaging in policy working.'

'Local sustainable energy forums sharing best practise and examples of successful projects and national coverage.'

'Talk to each other, be honest and challenge.'

'A return to the lessons learnt from Local Agenda 21 days with organisations and community groups as equal partners. Not forgetting that sustainability is about much more than just CO2 and sharing case studies and contracts via a web sustainability exchange.'

'UK Sustainable Energy Wikipedia.'

'Forum/network open to everyone to share good practise. Annual conference link in with work of energy saving trust/carbon action network.'

'Need less groups setting up and more people joining existing groups, less rivalry.'

'More international communication and govt-to-govt advisory roles.'

'Clear English. Drop the 'enviro-jargon': such language is a barrier and self-indulgent.'

'Promote co-operative/community and other social enterprise models for community empowerment – using local agencies to facilitate community ownership.'

'Bring all funding, professional expertise etc (EST, DECC, CLG, DEFRA, Warm Front etc) into a single organisation.'

'Ensure good projects are supported, researched and publicised, possibility of having our own 'new' media to inform us of initiatives and evidence.'

'Appoint a champions secretary to network with other similar people and share experience, report back etc.'

'Engaging private sector. Make doing good highly profitable.'

'Establish a central information point for all expertise on energy efficiency and renewable which can be accessed by all.'

'More joint working between organisations who respect each other for what they do.'

'A green city network, forums and events like this. A quality standard for low carbon businesses in the city 'Green City Certified' – fees going to small projects.'

'Difficult to find common ground with so many groups/ organisations who have their own agenda and ways of communication. Sort out the jargon, of which we are all culprits and stick to the middle way, between the technical and the opposite ways of presentation.'

'Twitter.'

'Stop thinking that any one of us can be the solution, start understanding what our small contribution might be and share it.'

'More working with big businesses and other unlikely bed-fellows.'

'More action less talk.'

'Decentralise power to town and district councils.'

'Get a sponsor for a national community energy column that features projects – need to get the news about energy



projects into the mainstream press.'

'Meet partners in local areas often and a single website for information sharing.'

'In networks and partnerships head for cross-sector collaboration and sharing, info exchange, promote and making innovative examples known. Making the region strong and connected.'

'Have more meetings like today and central forums/clubs that the public know and trust.'

'Consolidate evidence – people might have time to read one assessment of ten initiatives, but not ten assessments of one initiative.'

'More conferences involving rigorous outreach to other important members of the decision making community e.g. planners themselves.'

'Change working patterns to allow the time to meet, talk and learn more meaningfully.'

'Increase awareness and green practise in schools – particularly from 7/8 through to 17/18.'

'Government to 'free up' the planning process for community plans so sustainable energy schemes don't get bogged down in 'public enquires' and steam-rolled by persons/organisations in communities who have averted interest in opposing the community efforts.'

'Local exhibitions and demonstration projects – need promoting.'

'Publicise best practise from Europe e.g. 80% grants for solid wall insulations in Austria available since 1998.'

'Be open and spend time talking. We are all overburdened with email and reports and websites. Let's talk more. Also involve more talented marketing professionals, they'll help with messaging.'

'Have regular quarterly or biannual events which bring together all interested groups to have a forum where they can listen to each other, formulate ideas and plans and create an action plan on how to implement these.'

'One national fixed post-it board!

Help communities to understand the confusing proliferations of agencies with 'sustainable, carbon, and energy' in their names. Map what they do (to avoid duplication) set them clear targets to deliver carbon reduction.'

Q3

What's the single most important thing government could do to unleash the power of community action?

'Provide funding and let others provide the delivery.'

'Persuade government to release EPC and DEC information to public and private sector for analysis.'

'Seed-corn funding. The will is there but where is the cash?'

Use transition networks as an ally and harvest good will via allocation of small community grants for sustainable energy and climate change projects.'

'Fantastic feed-in tariffs that make returns secure and desirable.'

'Change planning laws so that only persons directly affected could object to wind turbines etc. Planning costs far too much.'

'Actively encourage the transition towns movement.'

'Leadership and coherence e.g. realise you can't persuade people to refurb their homes to save carbon whilst pursuing new coal and building third runways.'

'Provide a large pot of money for community projects, with funding for projects meeting relevant objectives, e.g. energy saving.'

'Find a way to invent the 'religion model' of public engagement – introduce a 'Christmas' or 'Children in need' festival – ask for help.'

'Fund people in poverty completely and leave CERT etc. to find carbon saving initiatives.'

'Make the feed-in tariff and renewable heat incentive only available to individuals or communities.'

'Provide discounts for decentralised renewable energy.'

'Introduces green taxes on consumption of unsustainable goods and educate children more in schools about energy use and waste.'

'Increase investment and support for community energy projects, and introduce legislation (as with the community right to buy in Scotland) that favours collective ownership.'



'We need more good news stories about environmental successes so that people start to believe they can make a difference.'

'Provide financial incentives e.g. tax relief or grants to achieve SAP ratings of 81.'

'Demonstrate that government itself is ready to act by setting strong carbon budgets and embedding carbon reduction across all departments and policies.'

'More funding for community development workers to harness the power of communities.'

'Empower the LSPs with adequate funding to deliver the LAA NI 186-188 targets.'

'Government should show that it means what it says by not pushing airport expansion and new coal development.'

'Place their confidence in the fact that they can unleash power by funding them hugely.'

'Empower the grassroots through a neighbourhood watch-style network strengthened by experts and political clout.'

'Introduce feed-in tariffs at a good enough rate to stimulate community energy ownership.'

'Decentralise like crazy.'

'Give local government proportional representation, to let a range of views get elected. Power of general competence, to do anything not specifically forbidden by law. We need to empower existing systems not invent new ones.'

'Introduce a carbon tax.'

'Devolve power, decisions and money to local initiatives.'

'Decentralised decision making with local budgetary constraints.'

'Apart from more cash, more empowerment to the voluntary groups to give them the confidence to speak up and knowing they will be listened to with an open mind, that their opinion counts.'

'Long-term funding to organisations that support community action – instead of short-term funding resulting in good projects folding and new ones continually re-inventing the wheel.'

'Make it tax efficient for individuals to take a stake in community projects and make the income or benefit of the project stay in the community. If people feel ownership they'll support and invested.'

'Council tax rebates for individuals who invest in low carbon projects or improve their A-G rating.'

'Show the money.'

'Bringing communities to the front – acknowledging them for the important work they do and the crucial role they have.'

'Give easy to access money e.g. like they have in Scotland that can be used for staff also.'

'Support and capacity building, financial incentives. Embrace community-first organisations who have had many successes in deprived areas.'

'Money and support.'



'Be honest. Government should let us know 'business as usual' will not return after this short recession.'

'Offer low interest loans (or government guaranteed loans) to go along side a generous feed-in tariff. (Loan schemes were launched in Germany and elsewhere alongside feed-in tariffs to ensure high levels of uptake).'

'Unleash power of community action by enforcement of the sustainable communities act.'

'Train community champions.'

'Act consistently. What government says, what it does and what it funds.'

'Provoke a reaction through community-wide 'stick' measures, that unite local people in grievances and action.'

'Learn from existing successful community/ co-op owned schemes and replicate where possible.'

'Communities need a single point of contact for advice and support'

'Trust from local authorities and central government that NGO communities know what to do.'

'More CERT money should be put into community initiatives rather than handing out grants to those individuals who may be able to pay.'

'Ease repressive, dictatory attitude towards top-down government and make it clear that community action is positive and to be welcomed.'

'Help with solutions for low carbon living so people know what to do.'

'Make funding much easier and more stable for local initiatives.'

'Provide sources of seed funding for application to local strategic projects to be administered by the community.'

'The government should go full steam ahead with the idea of renting out empty shops on the high street at very low costs or free to the community groups who will promote carbon reduction.'

'Make voting compulsory. Improve democracy and a feeling that voting does and can make a difference.'

'Consistent funding with minimum strings.'

'A large community fund for community projects to bid into.'



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