

Project type: **Rural community wide energy efficiency improvements**

Name of example: **Barcombe Energy Group**

The organisation

Barcombe Energy Group was formed by a group of local residents to explore the opportunities for making the village more sustainable and energy efficient. Barcombe is a village in Sussex with approximately 580 properties, a third of which were built before 1920. The village has four main housing types which are typical of villages in the region. None of the homes are connected to the mains gas network so there is a strong reliance on oil for heating systems.

The project

In 2012, Barcombe Energy Group was awarded funding from DECC under the Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) to carry out household energy efficiency assessments, community-building energy assessments, a parish wide renewable energy plan and a wide range of household retrofits across the community.

The first stage of the project involved a domestic energy survey hand delivered to every household in Barcombe Parish. The results were fed into a technical assessment of the local housing stock which identified scope for energy efficiency improvements.

Barcombe Energy Group were supported by Ovesco (Ouse Valley Energy Services Company) and helped with a programme of events (including Big Energy Breakfasts) and other activities to engage local residents. These gave householders another chance to complete the home energy survey, meet local specialists and ask questions about their homes and sign up for a range of energy efficiency improvements (including energy monitors, energy saving lighting, draught proofing makeovers and free insulation).

The project was publicised through the local parish magazine, the school, a banner located at a focal point in the village, notice-boards and other local networks, coupled with vocal support from the local vicar (who included it in a sermon after having his loft cleared and insulated). A town crier was used to encourage local residents to attend the Big Energy Breakfasts where they could sign up for home energy improvements. These awareness-raising activities generated a strong groundswell of interest and support for the project across the community.

Local installer Downs Energy was chosen as the insulation partner for the project because it was a local company and demonstrated strong support for the scheme, including by donating free draught-proofing kit. Similarly LED light replacements were undertaken by a specialist local company and the results were demonstrated through the local parish magazine. To install the draught-proofing, the group worked with the local Transition Town group in Lewes which had recently set up a small incubator draught-proofing business.

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Project funds were used to contribute to the costs of loft and cavity wall insulation where they could not be met by CERT funding. The housing assessment carried out by CSE and combined with the local Parish renewable energy assessment helped the Barcombe Energy Group build up a robust 'Energy Plan' that the village can use for developing a sustainable future.

Achievements

- During 2012, 150 homes had cavity wall and loft insulation installed – 20% of the village
- Many homes have taken up LED lighting retrofits
- The four main housing types in the village were assessed using the SAP system and Brighton University built an online 3-D modelling tool as a reference for local homeowners
- There is now a monthly draught-proofing team visit to the village
- Some local homes have decided to install renewable energy technologies in the form of air source heat pumps, biomass boilers and solar panels (PV and thermal)
- Two local sustainable businesses (reclaimed furniture store and vegetable box scheme) have undertaken PV projects that have been funded by the community through Ovesco
- The group are planning a large solar PV project and a wind turbine to continue to reduce their dependence on oil and provide a long term income for more energy efficiency improvements
- The group successfully applied for funding to DECC's RHPP Communities scheme, for heat generating renewable energy technology, with the offer extended to neighbouring parishes

"This has been a really exciting project for Barcombe Village. We are a community reliant on oil and the changes we have made will really help our community improve our energy usage and save money on our household bills"

Ollie Pendered from Barcombe Energy Group

Lessons learned

- The technical assessment of the local housing stock provided a useful foundation for the project, helping to prioritise measures by housing type, while the community energy report was a helpful tool for engaging the community on different options for local generation of renewable energy.
- SAP ratings on their own were of quite limited value to building owners since they didn't give recommendations. The group now recognise that EPC or Green Deal Advice Reports would have given more useful information for this kind of project.
- In retrospect the group might have done more to invite local groups to on-site demonstrations of the project and its benefits, and to seek advice from the relevant local authority departments at the right time in the project.
- In promoting the project, keeping the momentum going and getting people 'signed up' for improvements to be made to their homes, word of mouth between families, neighbours and friends (and the vicar) worked really well. The visibility of Downs Energy vans paying regular visits to the village also helped raise the profile of the project.

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Recommendations

- Following the launch and initial surge of activity, ensure you keep the community up-to-date with the project and its achievements to maintain momentum, for example through a regular monthly newsletter.
- With a project involving a potentially large number of people and partner organisations, it is important to maintain a core management group of three or four people with specified responsibilities to drive and coordinate progress.
- In the absence of LEAF funding, a similar project could still have gone ahead. We would have carried on having local energy group meetings and fairs and engaging with local installers suppliers, and would have looked at other funding sources including the Lottery, energy companies and Landfill Tax, all of which are options that other groups could consider.

Links

Project website: www.barcombe.community21.org/energyclub

Project overview: <http://youtu.be/8JfCxPVq6bE>

LEAF project website: <http://youtu.be/YX8XW7he010>

Resources

People 

A large number of local people and groups were involved, together with local suppliers and specialist partners. The core team was made up of three core paid project administrators, the parish clerk and a mail-shot delivery team of four.

Technical skills 

A broad mix of skills was required including community engagement, communications and marketing, project management, energy efficiency and building technologies. Barcombe Energy Group worked with Ovesco on a parallel LEAF project in Lewes to engage stakeholders in developing an energy efficiency and renewable power plan for the future.

Finances 

Barcombe Energy Group won approximately £50k from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) for a project which ran from January to March 2012. During the rest of the year, they used draught proofing kit that was donated by a local supplier and also accessed CERT funds to help householders to pay for insulation.

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Project partners



A wide range of local and national partners including Ovesco, the parish council, Transition Town Lewes, Lewes District Council, Downs Energy, Brighton University, Communities Matter and CSE.

Green Deal potential

Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) funding has now ended but the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) has been brought in to support the cost of Green Deal measures. Although the funding mechanisms would differ, the project could be replicated by community organisations working closely with local installers and advice organisations under the Green Deal.