

“WE NEED TO COME TOGETHER”

Lawrence Weston’s journey
to social fairness & net zero

A case study of a community by Harriet Sansom.
Commissioned by Local Trust.

September 2023

LAWRENCE WESTON'S JOURNEY TO **SOCIAL FAIRNESS & NET ZERO**

This report was commissioned by Local Trust and was written by Harriet Sansom (CSE), with support from Vic Wakefield-Jarrett (CSE), James Goodman (Local Trust), Lily Staunton-Howe (Local Trust) and Georgie Burr (Local Trust). CSE is grateful to everyone who contributed to this report, in particular those who gave their time to be interviewed and share memories, some of which were from over a decade ago.

Special thanks go to Lawrence Weston for letting us tell their story.

www.cse.org.uk

CONTENTS

Introduction	p3
Timeline	p6
The beginnings	p8
Solar farm development	p16
The journey of the wind turbine, from idea to delivery	p19
The list goes on	p25
Enabling conditions	p28
Appendix	p35
Glossary	p36



Youth Centre,
Long Cross,
Lawrence Weston,
Bristol BS11 0RX

0117 923 5112
www.ambitionlw.org
contact@ambitionlw.org
[@ambitionlw](https://twitter.com/ambitionlw)



St James Court,
St James Parade,
Bristol BS1 3LH

0117 934 1400
www.cse.org.uk
info@cse.org.uk
[@HelloCSE](https://twitter.com/HelloCSE)



Canopi
7-14 Great Dover Street
London SE1 4YR

020 3588 0565
www.localtrust.org.uk
info@localtrust.org.uk
[@LocalTrust](https://twitter.com/LocalTrust)

“WE NEED TO COME TOGETHER”

Lawrence Weston’s journey to social fairness & net zero

Lawrence Weston is a community of 7,220 people on the edge of Bristol, five miles to the northwest of the city centre. It is a post-war housing estate, adjacent to the M5 motorway and between the employment areas of Avonmouth and the Port of Bristol and Kingsweston Hill. The community has a much higher than the Bristol average proportion of children, young people and young families.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation¹ shows that deprivation levels are amongst the highest in the country, especially for skills, employment, health, income, children and older people, and crime. 27% of households do not own a car, and the area is somewhat cut off from neighbouring communities by open space and major roads, with public transport links widely regarded as being very poor.

Lawrence Weston is also a community which has its own community climate action plan; has a partnership with, and financially benefits from, a nearby solar farm; delivers domestic energy efficiency projects to address fuel poverty; has a Neighbourhood Plan which includes sustainable design policies for new builds; is delivering a resident-led co-housing project; and in June 2023 witnessed their 100% community-led and owned wind turbine – the biggest onshore wind turbine in England – begin generating enough clean electricity to power the community’s homes (accounting for 35% of the community’s domestic carbon emissions²).

1 The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures relative deprivation in small areas across the UK. Multiple components of deprivation from a range of datasets are collated, weighted, and compiled into a single score of deprivation.

2 Ambition Lawrence Weston (2022). Declaring our caring: Community Climate Action Plan.
www.ambitionlw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Ambition-Lawrence-Weston-Community-Climate-Action-Plan-Feb-2022.pdf



- ▲ ▲ Jim and Daphne outside the Lawrence Weston Youth and Community Centre. Daphne is a Director of Ambition Lawrence Weston and Jim co-runs the community's Men in Sheds.
 - ▲ Ambition Lawrence Weston and local residents at Blaise Plant Nursery, getting plants for the creation of a sensory garden at Blaise Weston Court (rented housing for older residents).
 - ▶ Lawrence Weston residents gardening and litter picking with charity Bristol Noise.
-

This case study seeks to tell the story of Lawrence Weston’s incredible journey to growing its community resilience whilst reducing its carbon impact. It is in no way definitive, but it draws on the voices of some of the critical people and organisations who were instrumental in this journey. It also draws out the key enabling factors that made it possible.

- A resident-led community anchor organisations with ambitious, skilled and highly dedicated staff and resident volunteers.
- Community plans articulating the community’s needs and priorities.
- A strong focus on quality-of-life benefits.
- No-strings-attached, long-term funding.
- Bristol’s mature ecosystem of individuals and organisations who are invested in climate and social justice work, with networks and high-profile momentum-building events which enabled this collaborative potential to be capitalised upon.
- Strategic and effective leverage of support from the city’s council and political administration.

Thank you to Lawrence Weston for letting us tell their story.



LAWRENCE WESTON’S JOURNEY TO SOCIAL FAIRNESS & NET ZERO

Below is a timeline of some of the key events that are detailed in the case study. These are events that are significant in the story’s unfolding. Things happened before 2011 and will continue in 2023 and beyond – but this is the time period that our story focuses on.

Abbreviations used in the timeline below

ALW	Ambition Lawrence Western
CCA	Community Climate Action
BEC	Bristol Energy Cooperative
CSE	Centre for Sustainable Energy
UCEF	Urban Community Energy Fund

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bristol ecosystem of actors & networks		▼ Roger Sabido attends Bristol Festival of Ideas.	▼ Bristol notified of successful European Green Capital application.	▼ Mark Pepper ▼ meets David Tudgey at a Bristol Energy Network event.	▼ Bristol’s European Green Capital year.								▼ ALW joins Bristol’s Community Leadership Panel on Climate and Just Transition
Lawrence Weston - growing community resilience		▼ Establishment of ALW. ▼ Establishment of Lawrence Weston planning group.		▼ David Tudgey starts working with Ambition Lawrence Weston.				▼ New Lidl store opens in Lawrence Weston	▼ Lawrence Weston’s Men in Sheds set up.		▼ Planning permission granted for community-led housing (Ambition Community Homes).	▼ Community activities to support residents through energy and cost of living crises. ▼ Bristol Emergency Winter Fuel Fund set up.	
Plan making			▼ Lawrence Weston’s first Community Plan published. ▼ Allocation of Lawrence Weston Neighbourhood Development Plan area.				▼ Lawrence Weston Neighbourhood Plan adopted.	▼ Lawrence Weston’s second Community Plan published.			▼ Community engagement to develop the Lawrence Weston community climate action plan.	▼ Publication of Lawrence Weston’s climate action plan.	
Funding	▼ NHS+ Neighbourhood Partnership funding to develop community plan.	▼ Lawrence Weston chosen as one of 150 Big Local communities.				▼ Ambition Lawrence Weston secures UCEF grant to explore legalities of pursuing a wind turbine project.	▼ Bristol Community Energy Fund grant for community engagement on wind turbine.		▼ Further funding secured for wind turbine development costs (2019-20). ▼ National Lottery Climate Action Fund launched.	▼ Climate Action Fund bid successful. CCA project starts.		▼ Thrive Renewables grants £4m loan to Ambition Community Energy.	
Renewables				▼ BEC and Ambition Lawrence Weston begin collaborating to develop a community solar farm (2014-16).	▼ Roger Sabido attends CSE neighbourhood planning workshop on community energy.	▼ Completion of Lawrence Weston solar farm.	▼ Accolade Wine wind turbine in Avonmouth approved. ▼ Site found for the community wind turbine.	▼ Ambition Community Energy established	▼ Exclusivity Agreement signed between Ambition Community Energy and Bristol council.	▼ Planning application approved for Lawrence Weston turbine.			▼ Lawrence Weston wind turbine begins generating electricity (June).
Broader context		▼ Localism Act.		▼ Establishment of UCEF (lasted to 2016). ▼ Publication of government’s Community Energy Strategy.	▼ Ministerial Statement on onshore wind energy.	▼ Department of Energy & Climate Change dissolved. ▼ Marvin Rees elected Bristol Mayor.			▼ Feed in Tariffs closed.	▼ Covid-19 pandemic.			



▲ ▲ The Lawrence Weston Community Gardening Group enjoying the sun at the Baptist Church. ▲ Nobby, who co-runs the community's Men in Sheds.

The beginnings

“ We are just forgotten. Stick people down here and forget about them.”

Lawrence Weston resident.³

“ In the beginning, it was the residents that were calling for something to happen ... the local secondary school had closed, the local college was closed, Bristol Drugs Project had an office here – that had gone – our local sports centre had gone, the buses were shit, the housing is crap and when you've got all of that, people are like ‘Hang on a minute, we need to do something about it’, and I think you need that collective spirit of ‘we need to come together to be able to do something about it’.”

Donna Sealey, local resident and Lead for Community Development & Engagement at Ambition Lawrence Weston (interview, 2023)

In 2011, in the context of Lawrence Weston having experienced the harshest end of austerity, with a growing proportion of residents feeling disengaged, disaffected and voiceless, NHS Bristol and the Avonmouth and Kingsweston Neighbourhood Partnership⁴ – a local forum which brought together residents and key stakeholders to explore local issues – jointly commissioned a report ‘Towards a Community Plan for Lawrence Weston’.

The report sought to identify issues and needs in the community, and critically to suggest recommendations for addressing these. Two key recommendations paved the way for the community’s future. One was to develop a comprehensive community plan⁵, and the other was to establish a community anchor organisation. Alongside the report, NHS Bristol and the neighbourhood partnership also funded a community development worker, Helen Bone (of Vivid Regeneration), for 12 months to work with a group of seven committed residents to take steps to realising the report’s key recommendations. This small group of residents included Mark Pepper, Roger Sabido and Val Pospischil.

3 Lawrence Weston: A community plan (video made Feb 2014) at www.ourbiggerstory.com/post_viewer.php?Type=V&Area_ID=1&ID=394

4 Neighbourhood Partnerships were area-based committees covering the whole of the Bristol City Council area, comprising local residents, the police, local businesses, organisations and local ward councillors. They aimed to provide a forum through which residents could shape and influence decision-making in their neighbourhoods. There were 14 partnerships across the city, and each developed distinctively in response to the local context and local needs. Due to funding cuts, Neighbourhood Partnerships were wound up in 2017.

5 Lawrence Weston Neighbourhood Development Plan. Plan Period 2015-2030.



The Lawrence Weston Community Plan was published in early 2013. It draws together the community's aspirations on everything from health and housing, to the environment, arts and culture: www.ambitionlw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ALW-Community-Plan.pdf

Ambition Lawrence Weston and the Lawrence Weston Community Plan

After a year of the residents group and Helen working together, in 2012 Ambition Lawrence Weston was established. This was the community's first anchor organisation, and its overarching mission was, and continues to be, 'to make Lawrence Weston an even better place to live and work'. Knightstone Housing Association, one of the local social housing providers, invested £10,000 in the organisation at its launch.

// Ambition Lawrence Weston is a development trust, for Lawrence Weston. Over the years there have been some strong voluntary sector organisations in Lawrence Weston, but there hasn't ever really been that anchor organisation that is about making Lawrence Weston a better place."

Helen Bone, Vivid Regeneration⁶

Alongside setting up Ambition Lawrence Weston, Helen also worked with the residents group to develop their first community plan. This was enabled with further funding from multiple sources, including Community First, Bristol City Council, Locality and City of Bristol College (all funders are listed in their plan, see link on p9). Residents were trained up to become community researchers and knocked on every one of the 3,000 doors across the community to ask residents what changes they wanted to see in their community. The Lawrence Weston Community Plan was published in early 2013 – a drawing together of the community's aspirations on everything from health and housing, to the environment, arts and culture.

// The community plan is the resident's mandate to give us the go ahead to work on their behalf ... We've got the local steering group which is resident led, our board is resident led, the planning group is resident led so we have been quite lucky, and I think when you have got successes and you do make change, people think maybe I will get involved then because ... they changed that or they're able to advocate for that"

Donna Sealey (interview, 2023)

The establishment of Ambition Lawrence Weston and the development of the community plan also brought with it a new approach to community development – a move away from activities and programmes that were reactive to and directed by available funding, towards an approach which started with the community needs and priorities and levered in funding to respond to these. Today Ambition Lawrence Weston employs three staff and has a membership of over 250 people, as well as over 40 active volunteers.

⁶ YouTube video: The launch of Ambition Lawrence Weston (Feb 2018):

www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6LFSaW7OHQ

Big Local funding

The Big Local programme was a ground-breaking National Lottery Community Fund programme, providing at least £1m to each of 150 communities across England. Communities were selected by the National Lottery, in consultation with local councils and other stakeholders, on the basis that the chosen communities had not traditionally received National Lottery or government funding despite significant deprivation levels. The programme stood in contrast to top down, time-limited and project-directed funding pots; instead, it was designed to be long-term (10-15 years), resident-led and non-prescriptive.

It required that each Big Local community establish a Big Local Partnership – a group of at least 8 people, more than half of whom had to be resident within the boundaries of the Big Local area, who would guide the overall direction of activity and spending in each community. A key part of this was the development of a Big Local plan, reviewed every 5 years, which was based on engagement with residents and outlined the community’s priorities. This would then guide spending.

The partnership also chose a ‘locally trusted organisation’ (LTO) to administer and account for the distribution of their funding, and/or deliver activities or services on behalf of the partnership.

In addition to funding, Big Local communities were given further support with capacity building, input from technical experts where needed, and became part of a national network of communities whom they could connect to and learn from.

In 2012 Lawrence Weston was one of the chosen Big Local communities. Ambition Lawrence Weston was chosen as the LTO to administer and account for the distribution of the Big Local funding and a Big Local partnership of local residents was established to guide this spending.

The timing of the funding was perfect. This injection of no-strings-attached funding at a time when residents were already engaged on a journey to improve their community meant there were good foundations from which to benefit from this opportunity. The funding enabled the newly established Ambition Lawrence Weston to immediately begin tackling the community’s priorities as laid out in the community plan, both through paying for ongoing staff time and funding community initiatives and activities.

// All that we've done really has been enabled by the Lottery Fund and the Big Local so, without that, we wouldn't have done any work, let alone climate or anything. That's been the driving force really, the resources and the funding.”

**Mark Pepper, local resident and Development Manager at
Ambition Lawrence Weston (interview, 2023)**

The Lawrence Weston Big Local Partnership was established, with Jacki Crouch – a resident committed to empowering the community and bringing back community spirit – as chair. The

Big Local partnership created the opportunity for a small group of residents to be connected to communities across England who were working on addressing similar issues, to learn from each other and from specialist organisations which the Big Local programme connected the Big Local communities to.

// Ambition Lawrence Weston was up and running then and would have run anyway, Big Local or not, but it enabled them to be a lot more active. I think that was the great thing about Big Local. And it started bringing other communities together and encouraging you to look more widely with away days.”

Roger Sabido, local resident, member of neighbourhood planning forum and board member of Ambition Community Energy (interview, 2023)

Throughout this story it is evident how far the Big Local funding and opportunities have shaped and enabled what has been achieved – both in terms of activities which have brought a climate mitigation benefit, and those which have built, and continue to build broader community resilience. In many cases these community initiatives have been rewarded with seed funding through Big Local (and then levered in additional funding from elsewhere) and been supported with Ambition Lawrence Weston staff time. Initiatives not captured elsewhere in this story include:

- Holiday activities and hunger programmes.
- More community events, including the hugely successful Lawrence Weston in Bloom.
- Campaign and lobbying work to bring a new supermarket to the area.
- A BMX track.
- More community volunteers and a greater level of social cohesion.
- Capacity to work with Bristol council, developers and other partners to increase the housing supply and encourage a diverse range of housing and tenure types to meet the needs of local residents.
- The provision of Lawrence Weston community transport.
- The provision of IT training to reduce digital exclusion.
- Better creche provision.

Lawrence Weston Planning Group and the Neighbourhood Development Plan

At the time of the community plan being developed, Lawrence Weston had numerous large sites that were being brought forward for new development – some of these being where community facilities had once existed and had subsequently closed. It was evident during community engagement activities for the community plan that residents were aware that the community would be impacted by new development and were very keen that this should be built to high standards,

meet the housing needs of the community, but also address wider community priorities such as poor service provision. Given this context, alongside the community plan development, Helen Bone supported residents to establish the Lawrence Weston Planning Group, with Mark Pepper as the chair and Helen as the secretary. The group was established with 27 members, which included Roger Sabido and Jacki Crouch. The aim of the group was to represent the interests of residents in any plans to develop the estate. Two of the area’s three councillors, Don Alexander and James Scott, sit on and are actively engaged with the group.

The timing of this coincided with the Localism Act, which, in 2012, brought into effect the opportunity for communities to develop their own neighbourhood plan – a statutory plan document, through which communities were able to have more say in shaping development in their area. The Lawrence Weston planning group saw this as an opportunity, and began the long journey towards having their own Neighbourhood Development Plan. The first steps were to register themselves as an official Neighbourhood Planning Forum and define their plan area. This registration process then gave them access to central government funding, administered through Bristol council, which enabled them to get support from an independent town planner to work alongside them in the writing of their plan.

The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) in Bristol were also delivering a support programme, funded through their own reserves and with follow-up on funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, for communities wanting to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation policies into their plan. Dan Stone from CSE stayed in touch and provided light-touch support to the Lawrence Weston planning group where needed, despite that not always being funded.

The majority of the 1,150 neighbourhood plans adopted in England were developed in places with low levels of deprivation. Lawrence Weston, with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country, was therefore unusual in this respect.

// I remember attending a design council seminar up in London, bringing together a variety of communities interested in doing neighbourhood development plan and they were a huge variety and it was quite clear that we were very unusual in the fact that we didn't have the professional skill sets, the architects, the town planners, the local authority planning people living as residents in our community that we could turn to and who would be interested in driving it forward ... some of the groups there were clearly professionally well able to take it on ... It was quite different for us.”

Roger Sabido (interview, 2023)

As with the community plan, community engagement was the bedrock of the neighbourhood plan development process, and housing became one of the plan’s key policy areas. Alongside policies on affordable housing provision and open space provision, the plan also had policies on sustainable design principles, with explicit reference to the need for new development to tackle climate change and fuel poverty. For some involved, the motivation behind this was primarily around

tackling poverty and insecure housing, whilst for others it was an awareness of who would be most impacted by climate change.

“ So, although we're talking about sustainability and all the rest of it, it really was economic sustainability we were after and that was keeping people's heating costs down, keeping their rent down and putting more money in their pocket. It just so happened that to do that, then you need to have really well insulated houses. You need to have ground source heat pumps instead of gas burning boilers. So it was more of a coincidence rather than an objective to save the climate.”

Mark Pepper (interview, 2023)

“ I suppose it's my understanding of what's going on here and my life experience told me that climate change is very real. And told me who was gonna be in the frontline when things started getting difficult and expensive and that's us here in Lawrence Weston...I suppose my trade union background as well made me prepared to get involved and think that you should be speaking up about these things and trying to make what impression you could ... Through our planning group and work with architects, I became very aware of things like passive house, the poor quality of our existing housing. The fact that I could then go off and, using the internet really, look at where these things had been implemented and you could see that passive housing was eminently doable. It wasn't the expense that people kept thinking with people like Hastoe housing association in the east of England being able to build passive social housing ... Yes, so it was being introduced to these things.”

Roger Sabido (interview, 2023)

The journey to an adopted neighbourhood plan was very time consuming, and much of the aspirational wording of the drafted policies was watered down to ensure the neighbourhood plan passed its examination (neighbourhood plans must be in conformity with the area's Local Plan to pass). Despite this, since the plan's adoption in 2017, residents do feel they have more power at the negotiation table with developers to push for higher standards – with many of these having a positive climate impact.

“ We were going to be heavily affected by new developments coming in online. So, that's why we embarked on delivering what is a very

complex, time-consuming, energy zapping journey, to try and improve the type of housing we were subject to ... It hasn't been as successful as we would have liked to have seen ... it was still a big learning curve for developers, especially some of the bigger house builders who thought the neighbourhood development plan was just guidance and not a statutory document...They wanted to put gas boilers in and they weren't taking much notice of the local authority or us ... in the end they had to draw down and put air source heat pumps in but in general, I think most developers welcomed it because they knew, if they could deliver the neighbourhood development plan requirements, then they've got a planning forum that would hopefully support their planning application and make the process a lot easier and smoother and cost effective.”

Mark Pepper (interview, 2023)

The Lawrence Weston Planning Group (www.ambitionlw.org/planning-group) continue to meet on a monthly basis, responding to development applications and proposals for their area, and ensuring residents have a voice about how their area is developed – including community buildings, homes, green spaces and the broader public realm.

Bristol Energy Network and David Tudgey

In 2015, Bristol was European Green Capital. The aim of the European Green Capital Award is to support and motivate European cities to improve their environment by awarding those that are making active and innovative efforts to achieve a more sustainable and healthier environment. Bristol council and Bristol Green Capital Partnership – a membership network of over 1,000 organisations across the city who have pledged to work towards a zero carbon and socially just Bristol – applied for the award in 2013 (the city's third attempt to secure the award). The application pulled together the work, impact and expertise of the city's hundreds of grassroots projects, businesses, community organisations and two universities. These stakeholders saw the year as an opportunity to build wider participation in green activities across the city. The year shone a spotlight on Bristol. It also required the City Council to contribute £1m towards the cost of developing a programme of specific projects to mark the award and to assist in raising funds from other sources, including the private sector – a total of £12.6m was raised.

In 2014, in the run up to Bristol's European Green Capital year, Ambition Lawrence Weston attended an event which sought to better connect community energy actors within the city with community anchor organisations, particularly those who hadn't yet become hugely engaged with the city's green activities. It was here that Mark Pepper, Ambition Lawrence Weston's community development worker, met David Tudgey, Project Development Manager at Bristol Energy Network (BEN) and an experienced community energy practitioner. BEN is an umbrella organisation for individuals and community groups with an interest in energy in Bristol and the surrounding area. From hearing about the community engagement activities BEN were doing, particularly around

energy awareness and low-cost energy efficiency measures, Mark saw the opportunity to address community issues relating to poor and expensive-to-heat housing. After a visit to Lawrence Weston to better understand the community issues and needs, David subsequently began working part-time for Ambition Lawrence Weston. He brought his experience and skills directly to supporting the development of community energy projects which were aligned with the priorities outlined in their community plan, and brought with them positive climate impacts. David’s time was initially funded through seed funding of £2,000 from Lawrence Weston Big Local; David subsequently secured additional funding from multiple sources to continue supporting his work with Ambition Lawrence Weston.

One of the early projects that David established, and which still continues, was in collaboration with a Bristol-based not-for-profit community enterprise called CHEESE (Cold Homes Energy Efficiency Survey Experts, <https://cheeseproject.co.uk>). The CHEESE’s mission was to reduce domestic energy losses at low cost. It does this through conducting low-cost thermal imaging surveys which show clearly where houses were losing heat, training up people to become surveyors, and providing advice about how households could make improvements (low, medium and high cost) to improve the efficiency. David secured multiple sources of funding to deliver a CHEESE project in Lawrence Weston, with funding from Bristol Green Capital 2015, Lawrence Weston Big Local, The MegaWatt Community Energy Fund, and others. During the project, residents and non-residents were trained at the Lawrence Weston Youth Centre to become ‘Energy Tracer’ surveyors, volunteers who can carry out thermal imaging surveys. Many homes in Lawrence Weston then benefitted from free surveys showing them where their homes lost heat and recommendations for low-cost changes they could make to reduce this loss. In some cases this evidence was also used to encourage social housing providers to make necessary and overdue improvements to homes.

David Tudgey’s work with Ambition Lawrence Weston during these earlier years also resulted in the integration of a community energy section within the second iteration of Lawrence Weston’s community plan. This section detailed four key objectives covering community-led renewable energy, the energy efficiency of existing and new buildings, the establishment of an energy learning zone, and supporting the uptake of electric vehicles. When in 2015 Ambition Lawrence Weston was granted funding to develop a ‘Community Economic Development Plan’, community energy activities were outlined as a key route through which to achieve the community’s economic development objectives. This funding was granted to 50 communities across England as part of central government’s Community Rights programme.

Solar farm development

Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC) is a critical actor in Bristol’s ecosystem of organisations working to mitigate climate change and build a more resilient and just future. The cooperative develops renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, with and for the benefit of the community.

Around 2014, BEC learnt of a Bristol council proposal for the development of a 5MW solar farm on low-grade council owned land on the north-western edge of Bristol – in close proximity to Lawrence Weston. BEC saw in this proposal the opportunity to develop a large-scale solar farm with

community benefit embedded within it. Having met Mark Pepper from Ambition Lawrence Weston at a Bristol Energy Network event, BEC approached Ambition Lawrence Weston with the two-fold challenge of – one, persuading the council to release their proposal to BEC for the development of an asset with community benefit for Lawrence Weston rather than as a council asset and two, to do this quickly enough to ensure the scheme was developed before a significant planned reduction in feed-in tariffs. Recognising that BEC's proposal required the Lawrence Weston community to officially support the solar farm planning application, Lawrence Weston's planning group, with the support of Bristol Energy Network, used this position of power to negotiate a good deal in terms of the scale of community benefit going to Lawrence Weston.

// Well, that's fine, yeah we can consider supporting you in the planning application if you share some of those profits ... we burrowed quite hard knowing that we were in the driving seat so to speak ... that was a real big signal to the residents, actually, you know, profits aside, it was about us being in control, us being in power, us calling the shots for a change and not outside organisations coming in no matter what their fantastic intentions are ... We've got a saying through all: 'What's in it for Ambition Lawrence Weston?'

Mark Pepper (interview, 2023)

BEC then worked with Ambition Lawrence Weston, with the support of Bristol Energy Network, over a 6-month period to persuade the council of the merit of their proposal and assuage any concerns. This involved multiple briefings to council staff across different departments, using the democratic mandate of Lawrence Weston's local councillors, and critically using both the existing contacts that BEC had within the council and an understanding of the internal workings of the council to push the proposal to strategic decision makers.

// The idea of community ownership or something like this was completely alien to many council departments. So what we needed to do was convince the decision makers that the solar farm could be done as a community scheme...you'll have certain officers that are supportive and others less so. And it's just about finding those that are supportive, and then trying to persuade those who aren't so much, and engaging with the administration more... it's helping to show people the bigger picture."

Andy O'Brien, Bristol Energy Cooperative (interview 2023)

// I think it all, it all comes down ultimately to having longstanding relationships that have been built up over a long period of time ... activity started to grow in the [Green Capital] stuff, and in parallel you got the

transition movement...So when we did need to find allies within the council to argue our case then there were people we'd been working with probably for five years...they weren't in the property services team. They were more like in the community development team. And with those allies...They help, they do their internal persuasion."

Andy O'Brien, Bristol Energy Cooperative(interview, 2023)

With the need for a speedy development process given the planned reduction in feed-in-tariff rates, Bristol Energy Cooperative contracted Mongoose Energy to project manage the development of the solar farm and secure finance for the building of it. Funding was secured from a mixture of sources, including loans from Triodos Bank, Social and Sustainable Capital and Bristol council, and funds from individuals via Bristol Energy Cooperative shares and bonds.

Richard Lowe, one of the hugely supportive staff members within Bristol council, describes the council's internal workings to support with some of the critical stages in the solar farm's development:

“ We decided that giving community group access was the right thing to do. And then the direction of travel is, well how can the council help that group to build it. So okay, the property team need to work on the lease, and the energy team need to work on a grid connection that needs to be built... And then the community group were still about £800,000 short...We suddenly can't build if we haven't got enough money; 'Excuse me, council, can you give us a bridging loan?' That last piece alone gave me a lot of sleepless nights! I'll be honest with you. So there was a huge sign-off process. The problem is if you've never done things before, then it's really hard to get all the senior people to accept that this is a low-risk thing to do. A huge amount of due diligence on the finance team, and a lot of questions that need to be answered. But the result is that the council gave a lease, a grid connection, and they gave a bridging loan...that took months and months of effort, hundreds of office hours' time to get those three things over the line.”

**Richard Lowe, Bristol City Leap, and former staff member
at Bristol council (interview, 2023)**

The 4.2 MW solar farm was completed in 2016. The Lawrence Weston community received £150,000 upfront at the stage of the farm's completion, and continues to receive an annual income. Ambition Lawrence Weston have invested this money in a range of energy support activities. Bristol council receives rental income from Bristol Energy Cooperative for the lease of their land and ongoing payments to pay for the cost of the grid connection that the council had already secured prior to BEC becoming involved.

The journey of the wind turbine – from idea to delivery

// If I climbed up almost onto the roof, see over the warehouses, to the docks... I had these four [wind turbines] in front of me and from the off when I started looking at community energy...I would just jump on the bike and go out to Avonmouth and think 'there must be more room'...we must be able to build a wind turbine. If those work here, we must be able to have one."

Roger Sabido (interview 2023)

From the top floor of his house, Roger Sabido could see across to the Avonmouth wind farm, sitting on the edge of the Severn Estuary. Roger, a long-term resident and active community volunteer, had become increasingly interested in community energy. In 2012 he was inspired by a talk he attended as part of the Bristol Festival of Ideas on the importance of communities owning and building their own energy infrastructures. Soon after he learnt about the activities of Easton Energy Group, a community energy group in East Bristol of which David Tudgey was a core member, and was subsequently introduced to the activities of other community energy organisations through a Big Local away day.

One evening in the pub, following a planning group meeting, Roger said to Mark Pepper – 'Wouldn't it be a fantastic idea to deliver a wind turbine?'. In time, Ambition Lawrence Weston directed the work of David Tudgey towards exploring the feasibility of this idea – and so began the journey to Lawrence Weston's 100% community-led and community-owned 4.2MW wind turbine, which generates enough clean electricity to power over 3,000 homes.

// Roger and Mark basically said to me 'You're doing great stuff with everything. We'd like you now to develop a wind turbine.' I said 'Right, okay'. That was when I was already working on a project in Easton, the Owen Square Project, where we'd been looking at ground source heat pumps and looking at retrofit. We had our own UCEF project where we were looking at domestic solar on buildings and we had a business model that would work but the feed-in-tariff changed very rapidly before our business model could be delivered so we missed our window. Fortunately I was working with a wind engineer [Charles Gamble] on that project and I said 'I know this one's just fallen through; would you like to work with me on this wind project?' That's how serendipity worked there."

**David Tudgey, Ambition Community Energy CIC and
Bristol Energy Network (interview, 2021)**

The development of the turbine succeeded in spite of a very hostile policy environment. Following the 2015 general election, a Written Ministerial Statement introduced a subsequent change in government planning policy (fulfilling a commitment made in the Conservative election manifesto), which many felt put an effective ban on onshore wind. The change in policy required that a wind energy development proposal could only be granted permission if the proposed site was in an area allocated in the relevant Local or Neighbourhood Plan as being suitable for wind energy development, and that the proposal had the backing of the local community.

In 2015, Roger Sabido attended one of the Centre for Sustainable Energy's neighbourhood planning workshops. The workshop explored the opportunities for enabling community energy schemes, through neighbourhood development plans. Whilst the Written Ministerial Statement had made it very difficult to pursue onshore wind projects, doing it through the neighbourhood planning process, where community support and approval could be demonstrated, remained a possible route. This provided some hope.

In early 2016, the Urban Community Energy Fund (UCEF) was coming to a close. UCEF was a £10m programme, funded by the Department for Energy and Climate Change, and administered by the Centre for Sustainable Energy, to kick-start renewable energy generation projects in urban communities across England. Groups were able to access grants and loans to support the development stages of a renewable energy project that would bring significant benefits to the local community. Ambition Lawrence Weston were successful in securing a UCEF grant to both explore the legalities of developing an onshore community wind turbine, including outside of the neighbourhood planning process, and to support their engagement activities to understand whether there was sufficient community support for a wind turbine.

Their engagement activities were further supported when, in 2017, Ambition Lawrence Weston secured grant funding from the Bristol Community Energy Fund (created by Bristol council) to run an 8-week energy internship programme. The programme was aimed at residents who were long-term unemployed or in temporary employment. Alongside upskilling the interns in undertaking energy audits of community buildings and thermal imaging, the interns also surveyed the community on their energy needs and views, including on community renewables.

// I don't want you to underestimate the amount of work that went in to try and engage and get the levels of support that we did, not just in Lawrence Weston further afield in Bristol...The local businesses, the big companies in Avonmouth, churches absolutely everyone and everywhere we absolutely flooded the place to try and get their impression of whether or not we were on a winner basically. So I don't think we missed anyone and like I say, if we had, we'd have acted on it. But that's not to say we haven't."

Mark Pepper (interview 2021)

In 2017, another critical event was the approval by Bristol council’s planning department of an application submitted by Accolade Wines for a wind turbine in an industrial estate neighbouring the Lawrence Weston estate. Ambition Lawrence Weston submitted a community statement of support on behalf of this proposal, having themselves gone through a lot of community engagement which had demonstrated high levels of resident support for renewables. The council, despite hostile national planning policy, recognised the turbine’s potential contribution to the city’s ambitious carbon reduction targets. This gave a signal to Ambition Lawrence Weston that there was potential for them to pursue the development of a wind turbine separately from their neighbourhood planning work.

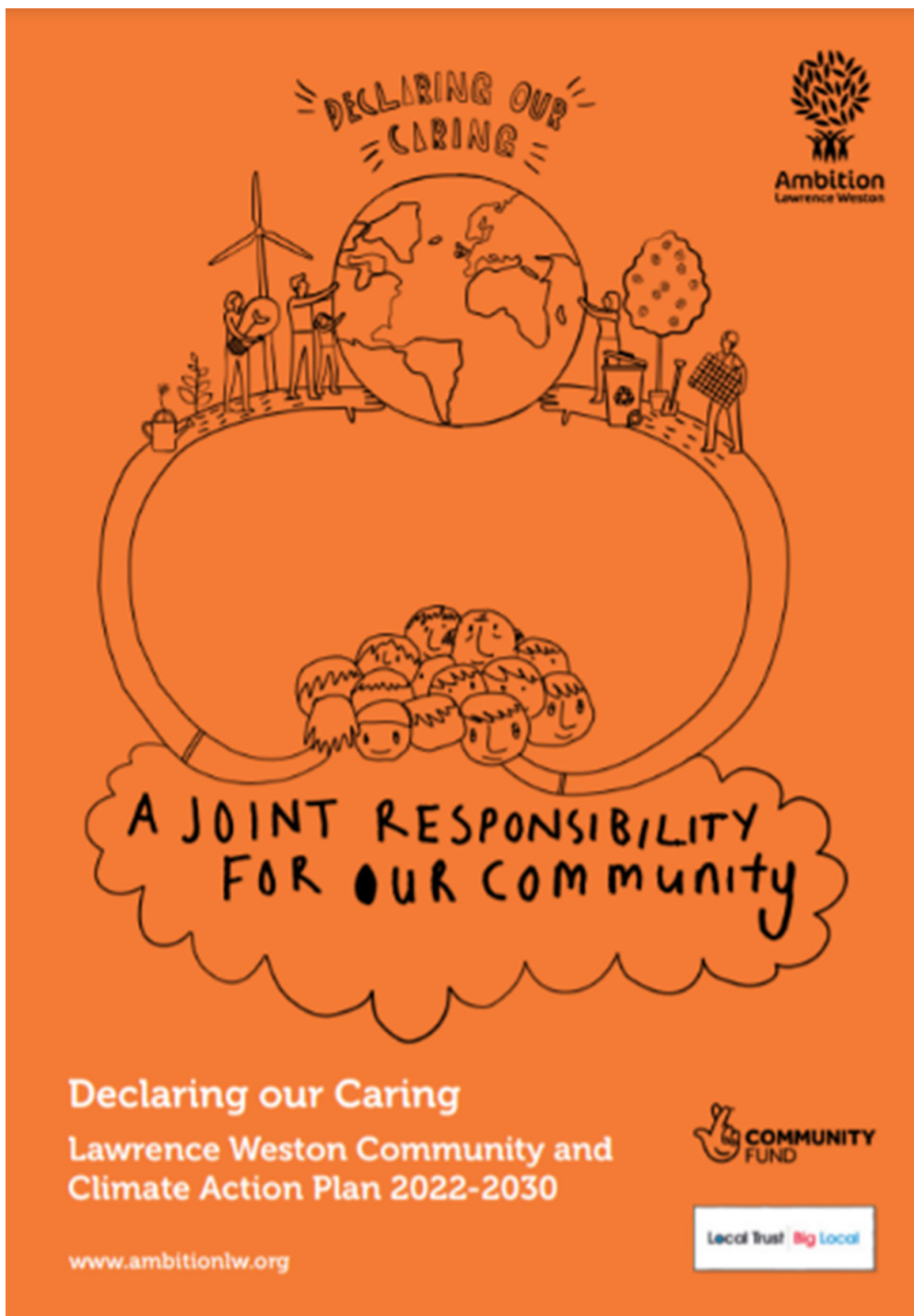
During these early stages of the project’s development, David Tudgey and Charles Gamble engaged with Bristol council’s Head of Planning, and council officers began working with them to find a suitable council-owned site for a community wind turbine. A preferred site, known as ‘Land Southwest of Seabank’ on Severn Road in Avonmouth, was found in 2017.

“ We had actually done that assessment of the whole city and they said ‘No, you’re not allowed those ones. You can have these three. These are potential ones.’ It was Property Services that came forward with the three that they offered and then we assessed those three sites against our criteria. So it’s engaging the right people and learning how to navigate your local authority.”

David Tudgey (interview 2021)

In 2018, David Tudgey and Charles Gamble set up Ambition Community Energy (ACE) – a separate delivery organisation to drive forward the project and, critically given the risk associated with trying to develop a large-scale renewables project, to remove any liability to Ambition Lawrence Weston. In August 2018 ACE secured a loan from the Bristol Community Energy Fund to support funding their development costs.

“ I mean get this right, the government had a Community Energy Department...They had a bit of funding, and so we drew down funding there and set up the Bristol Community Energy Fund, and put together with the help of CSE a loan scheme. So, basically, financing the development, the risky part, of community projects, and through competition awarding contingent loans, meaning that the project would only repay the loan on completion of the project...The wind turbine received £80,000...it’s free money at the start of the project so they could get going. All the planning and qualification works...and that leveraged other funding from the combined authority, and other social capital organisations. So without that £80,000, it would have been difficult for



Ambition Lawrence Weston's Community Climate Action Plan 2022-30, aptly named 'Declaring our caring', is the result of extensive community consultation and outlines the community's climate-related priorities and proposed actions. The plan focusses on improving the lives and well-being of residents through climate-positive actions. The plan is organised around the key sustainability themes of transport; buildings; energy; food; waste & consumption; nature; and economy, business, jobs & education. The plan includes a range of priority actions in each theme, from 'Establish a Renewable Energy and Modern Method in Construction skills academy', and 'Reduce the use of pesticides', to 'Set up a community fridge' and 'Develop a community-owned electric car club scheme'.

the project to get started, it feels like now in hindsight. An that funding would not have been there without central government looking at Bristol, and going ‘Well, we think that you can probably do something with a slug of money.’ That department doesn’t exist anymore, so how that would happen again is very hard to see.”

Richard Lowe (interview 2023)

At the end of 2018 and into 2019, ACE were successful in securing grant funding to pay for ongoing development costs, with over £150,000 in grant funding from Power to Change and the Port Communities Resilience Fund – a fund using capital from the sale of Bristol’s port to improve the resilience of the Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston Wards (adjacent to the port area), and which selected successful applicants through a panel and a public vote.

With a growing amount of resource dedicated to the development process for the proposed wind turbine, in 2019 ACE entered into an exclusivity agreement with Bristol council which required, amongst other conditions, that the council not hold discussions with any third parties regarding the future of the chosen site and that ACE were permitted access to undertake the necessary surveys and investigations to enable a planning application to be prepared and submitted.

In 2020, £500,000 of grant funding was secured via the West of England Combined Authority’s Local Energy Scheme (a European Regional Development fund programme to support community renewable energy schemes), and £300,000 in loan funding was secured from City Funds (a collaboration between Quartet Community Foundation, Bristol and Bath Regional Capital and Bristol council which ‘brings together the public and private sectors, mixing investment, grant-funding and pro bono support to make Bristol a fair, healthy and sustainable city’).

In March 2020, a planning application was submitted for a 150m single wind turbine. Whilst the application was initially recommended for refusal on a technical point (due to the 2015 Written Ministerial Statement), on 17 August a planning committee granted approval. In early 2022, Thrive Renewables provided a £4m loan to Ambition Community Energy to finance the construction of the wind turbine. In June 2023, the community-owned wind turbine, England’s biggest onshore wind turbine, began generating enough clean electricity to meet the domestic demand of Lawrence Weston. Not only is the scale of the turbine combined with the fact that it is community-owned an incredible achievement, it is the success of this dream at a time when so little onshore wind energy is being developed – in 2022 only two wind turbines were built in England, despite overwhelming public support for onshore wind.

Community Climate Action project (2020-ongoing)

In 2019 the National Lottery Community Fund launched a major new ‘Climate Action Fund’, a 10-year £100m programme to support community-led climate action across the UK. In Bristol, under the leadership of the Bristol Green Capital Partnership and in partnership with Bristol council and CSE, community organisations were invited to submit expressions of interest to be part of a collaborative bid for Bristol. The project sought to focus on neighbourhoods experiencing inequality and disadvantage, and to champion the needs of these communities in the city’s strategic climate-

related decision-making and programmes. Lawrence Weston, represented by Ambition Lawrence Weston, was selected to be one of the 6 Bristol communities, and in summer 2020 Bristol was chosen as one of the 15 successful Climate Action Fund projects across the UK.

// So, when we did our first community plan, this is 2012, it wasn't even on anyone's radar. No-one was talking about energy and solar and wind and then when we did our rewrite of our second plan, we had to put an energy section in the second plan because residents kind of were thinking like 2017/2018 hang about, what's all this solar and electric vehicles that were starting to come on the market. Well, we need electric car charging points then and green spaces...So, around that time, it was kind of on peoples' radars. And then 2020, it's kind of gone mad, hasn't it? Renewable energy – it really did pique peoples' interests."

Donna Sealey (interview 2023)

Stage 1 of what became Bristol's Community Climate Action project (<https://bristolgreencapital.org/projects/community-climate-action-project-overview>) provided 18-months' worth of grant funding to enable Lawrence Weston to develop a community climate action plan; with their community plan due for a refresh, Ambition Lawrence Weston saw this as an opportunity to integrate the two. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, they undertook an adapted community engagement campaign, to engage residents to understand existing and emerging community needs and priorities. Whilst the project and plan had a 'climate' theme, the primary focus and motivation for Ambition Lawrence Weston's engagement and activities remained to be 'improving residents' lives', with a positive climate outcome being the co-benefit.

// Actually, what we're thinking about is improving the biodiversity in the community, improving local habitats, reducing plastic waste... walking more, cycling more, cleaner air, better for you, cheaper for you, but actually, there's loads of climate benefits...our focus is still around improving residents' lives for whatever reason, but it's just got those climate outcomes as well."

Donna Sealey (interview 2023)

Stage 2 of the project sees a further 3 years of funding, running till 2025, to support Ambition Lawrence Weston to focus on key climate-related priorities within their climate action plan and to develop projects and activities around these. Green spaces, healthy cooking and heating, and food growing are key areas of interest amongst residents, so this is where their climate action fund project activities are focussing:

// Our Grow, Cook and Eat Lawrence Weston Project which is about growing, cooking and eating in Lawrence Weston...we have recruited an

ecologist and a horticulturalist to work with us to look at all of Lawrence Weston's green spaces; where can we grow more, what can we plant and then we've got the allotment. So, the allotment is very new...but we're going to be working with local residents growing on that site, and then all of that food will go into cooking meals for the community. And we've got a community fridge here at the community centre so any surplus will go into that."

Donna Sealey (interview 2023)

Looking at Bristol's Community Climate Action project as a whole, the programme is bold, pioneering and innovative. A key ambition is the development of a network of diverse communities across Bristol – by the end of the project (2025) a further 12 community anchor organisations will have been mentored through developing their own community climate action plans. With its wealth of experience in community engagement, and climate-related activities, Ambition Lawrence Weston is a critical mentor to these other communities. To further champion community leadership on climate and to advocate for a just net-zero transition, the project is also establishing a new Community Leadership Panel on Climate and Just Transition for the city. Ambition Lawrence Weston will be a key member of this panel, which aims to bring strategic community leadership into Bristol's planning and action on climate change and nature recovery.

The list goes on

There are many incredible initiatives in Lawrence Weston that haven't been captured in this story. All of which are driven forward by a desire to improve the quality of life for the community's residents, but all of which bring a positive climate impact. What is also clear is that through these community initiatives, community resilience is growing – through the establishment and building of good community relationships and networks, strong local leadership, local knowledge and skills, and economic investment. And it is this resilience which will be critical as the community has to increasingly adapt to an unstable future.

Some of the community initiatives that aren't detailed in this story are summarised below.

The successful delivery of a supermarket on the old site of the community's college. In 2013, after the college's closure, Bristol council began developing plans for the site to be allocated to housing. However, with the community plan highlighting the dire need in the community for a low-cost supermarket to enable residents to meet their daily food shopping needs locally and affordably, Ambition Lawrence Weston and residents began a campaign to bring a supermarket to the site. With the support of their local MP, including leveraging in contacts within the property industry, and multiple years of continued resident campaigning, a new Lidl store opened in 2018.

The community's 'Men in Sheds' is an example. Set up in 2019 by residents Nobby, Mike and Jim who wanted to use their trade skills and create a safe place to bring men together and address

isolation and loneliness. Ambition Lawrence Weston secured kickstart funding from Bristol Ageing Better for the project, which enabled them to secure and renovate a workshop. The project has grown from a monthly session to multiple sessions every week, including a regular repair café.

The in-development community-led housing project – Ambition Community Homes – which was set up to address housing issues identified in the community plan. Through this, Ambition Lawrence Weston, in partnership with Barefoot Architects, and with Brighter Places housing association as their construction partner, hope to build 36 sustainable, high quality and affordable homes on council-owned land. The project was granted planning permission in 2021. Other work on the scheme included the development of a local lettings plan for the site.

The ‘Emergency DIY draughtproofing’ workshops run by Bristol Energy Network which, as energy prices began to rocket in 2022, showed Lawrence Weston residents how they could make small and low-cost changes in their homes to improve comfort and reduce their energy costs. And alongside this, the Bristol Emergency Winter Fuel Fund, also set up in 2022 by Bristol Energy Network with donations from Bristolians amounting to £20,000. Through the fund Lawrence Weston residents (alongside five other communities across Bristol) could be referred for financial help with their energy bills.

The multiple initiatives in the community which seek to address isolation and loneliness, including: the Hope Café in Lawrence Weston’s Baptist Church which provides an open and welcoming space for all; the Surviving Isolation art and poetry competition; and the Growing Support programme in the Lawrence Weston community garden which works to tackle loneliness, social isolation and inactivity through gardening.

And the list goes on.



▲ Lawrence Weston's community wind turbine.

Enabling conditions

Having sought to tell the story of Lawrence Weston’s incredible journey of increasing community resilience whilst significantly reducing its carbon impact, here we pull out from that story some of the critical enabling conditions that supported them on this journey.

Ambition Lawrence Weston – a resident-led community anchor organisation

Community anchor organisations are an important feature of the social infrastructure that communities need to thrive, especially those experiencing long-term deprivation⁶. As communities increasingly need to cope with and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and need to be an active part of strategic programmes to mitigate and adapt to it, this social infrastructure becomes ever more paramount. The presence of Ambition Lawrence Weston, with paid members of resident staff (only three!) who are committed and ambitious, and whose mission is to improve the quality of life for those within the community, is critical to what has and continues to be achieved in the area. With its broad remit Ambition Lawrence Weston does not focus on a particular demographic or approach – it is flexible, adaptive and works to build community resilience and meet residents’ needs. Ambition Lawrence Weston is well-trusted and respected by residents because of its consultative approach and ongoing achievements. This in turn has enabled the team to propose, and gain resident support for, innovative projects – most notably the wind turbine – which have brought with them a positive climate impact.

Community anchor organisations need core funding to be able to work proactively and creatively; they need to be resident-led and asset-based, tapping into local expertise, knowledge and skills; and they need opportunities to benefit from capacity building that is bespoke. Trailblazers, like Ambition Lawrence Weston, need to be resourced to share their knowledge and experiences with other communities who are earlier in their journey. They also need to be connected to and learn from other trailblazing communities, to continue to push forward their innovative and bold community development work.

Community plans developed through extensive community consultation

The presence of a community anchor organisation in combination with community plans together form the bedrock of what has been achieved in Lawrence Weston. These plans have been developed through extensive but focussed episodes of community consultation and articulate the community’s assets, needs and priorities. Whilst the community is consulted and feels listened to, the danger of consultation fatigue has been carefully managed. These community plans are then the mandate which guide Ambition Lawrence Weston’s community development work, and have enabled an approach which starts with the community’s needs and priorities and levers in funding in response to these, rather than being reactive to and directed by available funding. These plans

7 Local Trust (2023). Policy spotlight 1: How social infrastructure improves outcomes: <https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Local-Trust-policy-spotlight-social-infrastructure-2023.pdf>

have also given funders confidence in the accountability of Ambition Lawrence Weston’s work and their dedication to improving the livelihoods of residents.

The development of a community plan creates the opportunity for extensive, resident-led consultation that is not shaped by a particular agenda, but rather has the goal of capturing the diversity of voices and needs within a community towards the overarching mission of improving the community. It provides the opportunity for residents to feel listened to – critical in achieving trust in communities which feel voiceless – and it creates a solid foundation against which funding can be levered in to address community priorities. Where broad community consultation is resourced, it needs to be by the community and for the community. Actors who are embedded in a community, such as community anchor organisations, know much better than external stakeholders the ‘sweet spot’ before communities begin to feel consultation fatigue. The case of Lawrence Weston also demonstrates how the articulation of community needs and goals can then clearly result in the delivery of change towards meeting these.

The importance of framing

Ambition Lawrence Weston understands the importance of framing in realising their mission, which is ‘to make Lawrence Weston an even better place to live and work’. This is the starting point across all their resident engagement, and their activities and projects. Their large-scale projects, notably the solar farm and the community wind turbine, have been pursued because they bring with them the possibility of an ongoing financial gain for Lawrence Weston – and this is the framing, and the reason, through which they have secured wide community support to pursue the projects. Where there have been opportunities to secure climate-focussed funding to realise their mission, they have framed their narrative to funders to focus on the very real climate-related co-benefits of their proposed activities. They consciously and effectively speak to the different priorities of their audiences.

There is a lot to learn from Lawrence Weston’s approach to engaging their community and gaining support for projects that bring a strong environmental benefit. The climate crisis is the issue of our time, and fundamentally jeopardises the well-being of all communities. And, as underlined by the Committee on Climate Change in their 2023 Progress Report, we are at the point where ‘a coherent public engagement strategy on climate action is long overdue’. But in communities like Lawrence Weston, which will disproportionately be affected by climate change, and which have lower-than-average emissions, the starting point for engagement and action must be improving quality of life. Those seeking to engage with such communities – regional authorities, local authorities, town and parish councils, businesses, funders, environmental NGOs – are encouraged to do so from this basis. At the same time, community anchor organisations in disadvantaged communities would benefit from witnessing how community development work is also climate work⁷, and of the growing opportunities to benefit from funding and programmes which are aimed at tackling climate change.

7 Local Trust (2023) Why community development work is climate work, <https://localtrust.org.uk/news-and-stories/blog/why-community-development-work-is-climate-work>

Bristol's ecosystem of actors, experts and support networks

The work of Ambition Lawrence Weston sits within Bristol's mature ecosystem of individuals and organisations who are invested in climate and social justice work. There are long-established relationships between the city's climate, social justice, and, increasingly, community development actors, and there are networks and events which regularly bring them together. Bristol Energy Network, Bristol Green Capital Partnership (a partnership of over 1,000 member organisations committed to a zero carbon, socially just Bristol), the city's annual Festival of Ideas – these are some key examples, through which people are inspired, ideas are seeded, experience and expertise is shared, and collaboration is fostered. This context has meant there have been opportunities for Lawrence Weston to benefit from local expertise, support and emerging opportunities. And as Ambition Lawrence Weston has become a stronger actor in this web, their sense of connectedness to a range of actors and communities across Bristol has grown.

It is important to note that the presence of such networks and forums doesn't in itself guarantee anything – there needs to be proactive engagement on both sides for disadvantaged communities to benefit. In the case of Lawrence Weston, Roger Sabido and Mark Pepper proactively engaged with these networks, meetings and opportunities. Concurrently, Bristol Energy Network sought to proactively grow the diversity of communities engaging in sustainable energy activities and projects. More recently, the Community Climate Action Project actively brings together disadvantaged communities from across the city, including Lawrence Weston, with Bristol council, technical experts, and the city's rich creative sector, creating a forum in which community expertise, technical expertise and council representation and support is building rich and creative community climate action.

To make a socially just net zero transition, innovative and collaborative programmes and approaches will be critical. In places, networks which bring together actors around particular sustainability themes or agendas should be supported. Where these networks already exist, those active in them should reflect on the degree to which the network are reaching out to and engaging with disadvantaged communities in their area. For area-wide programmes, there is a lot to learn from the approaches and successes of Bristol's Community Climate Action project.

Making climate action high profile and aspirational

The designation of Bristol as European Green Capital 2015 – the first UK city to receive this accolade – was significant. It built momentum for those across the city working on sustainability, and it demonstrated a city-wide interest and commitment to tackling climate change. It broadened the diversity of those engaging in and benefitting from these activities – which Lawrence Weston is testament to. And through shining a light on the city, it increased the profile and visibility of existing work on sustainability, and encouraged significant capital investment to support and develop this.

High-profile sustainability awards and goals – which have the potential to raise media attention and lever in funding – can help build momentum in an area and be a focus for growing the diversity of people and neighbourhoods engaging in climate action. These should be supported at the local

and national level, through government, businesses, and civil society actors.

Effective engagement with council officers and the political administration

Ambition Lawrence Weston and others working with and on behalf of them, have proactively engaged with Bristol council staff and the political administration – Councillors, MPs, Cabinet Members and the Mayor – to pursue, enable and aid their ambitions. This has led to Bristol council and the political administration playing critical enabling roles at various points on the community’s journey to greater resilience and a reduced climate impact. Invested council staff members who have gone above and beyond their job remit to listen, support and take risks, who have supportive policy frameworks that they can use to open decision-making doors, have been instrumental, as has the provision of council grant and loan funding at critical moments.

At key moments it has been the pincer motion of Lawrence Weston advocates pressing their political representatives and reaching out to Cabinet Members ‘at the top’, and council staff pushing proposals through the council decision making tree ‘from the bottom’, which has led to supportive council decision-making. It is also evident that, as councils become increasingly stripped to the bone and are having to make incredibly difficult decisions about what to do and not do, the necessity of political support at a local and city-wide level is increasingly important.

Communities and community anchor organisations, wanting to build their climate resilience and mitigate their climate impact, will at various points on this journey need the support of their council. To effectively engage councils, you need to understand how to navigate them. Community development teams, which are out and about, knocking on doors in disadvantaged communities can be a critical inroad into the councils’ complicated and intricate arterial system, supporting residents to navigate this but to also represent their needs and priorities within the council. Bristol council is in a minority of councils which have an in-house community development function: more of these teams should exist and be sufficiently resourced.

Funding – long-term and well-timed

Funding, and the timing of funding, has been fundamental in Lawrence Weston’s story over the last decade. The injection of Big Local long-term funding, managed by and for the community, soon after the community plan was written and Ambition Lawrence Weston was established was transformational. This funding enabled a significantly different approach to community development activities that had gone before in the neighbourhood, which had been more patchwork and directed by short-term funding pots. It provided core funding for Ambition Lawrence Weston’s three-person team, enabling them to proactively, creatively and ambitiously begin delivering against the community’s priorities and needs.

Other critical funds have included: development funding (grants and loans) to explore the viability of renewable energy schemes – some of which has come via central government funding granted to Bristol council and Bristol-based organisations to build community energy activities; and the 5-year Climate Action Fund funding which has enabled Ambition Lawrence Weston to grow its

climate work outside of specific schemes and become more connected with other communities across Bristol working to build their climate resilience. It is interesting to note that the National Lottery’s Climate Action Fund programme is significant in its scale for being a charitable grant programme with a climate focus. It also comes at a time when charitable funding for environmental issues is growing, although slowly and from a very low base – in 2016 only 2% of charitable funding went to environmental issues, and this had grown to 4% in 2022 (Environmental Funders Network).

No-strings-attached funding, which communities can determine, in a transparent and accountable way, how to use to address community needs, is really important. For communities which have little in the way of social infrastructure, it is critical that this funding is accompanied with capacity building, and where needed expert support. There needs to be significantly more funding directed at communities to enable and empower them to build their community and climate resilience, especially more disadvantaged communities. For these communities, funding programmes need to recognise that the priority for many residents and community organisations will be about improving quality of life, and growing the confidence and capacity of residents – funds should be designed and promoted with this in mind.

The people

And finally, it is without a doubt the presence of ambitious, driven, hugely committed individuals, working within and for Lawrence Weston, without whom this story would not be being told.

Mark Pepper

Mark is Ambition Lawrence Weston’s Development Manager and a dynamic, bold, savvy and open-minded resident and natural leader, who has lived in Lawrence Weston his whole life. He brings over 25 years of experience as a qualified social worker and youth and community development manager, and holds a deep commitment to making it a better place for all its residents.

Roger Sabido

Roger is a committed, interested, thinks-outside-the-box, long-term resident and hugely active community volunteer and core planning group member. He has a background in trade unions and the cooperative movement, and brings a keen awareness of the impacts of climate change and how lower-income communities will be most negatively impacted.

Donna Sealey

Donna is Ambition Lawrence Weston’s Community Development Manager and a compassionate, committed, fantastic community engager. She is a Lawrence Weston resident, who drives forward Ambition Lawrence Weston’s climate action work, bringing with her a background in public health and a strong knowledge of health issues in the community.

David Tudgey

David Tudgey is a community energy practitioner who has played a pivotal role in nurturing and coordinating grassroots community energy initiatives in Bristol. He is a founding director of Bristol Energy Network, has a deep-rooted commitment to addressing climate change and advancing social justice, and is Project Development Manager of the Ambition Community Energy CIC wind

turbine having overseen all aspects of the project’s development since 2016.

Amy Smith

Amy is a committed local resident, administrator and finance worker for Ambition Lawrence Weston (prior director) and Ambition Community Energy, and who was previously the resident chair of Ambition Community Homes.

In all communities, there will be residents, sometimes just two or three, who are actively engaged in making their community a better place. These community champions can play a critical role in building the social infrastructure in a community. These champions need to be recognised and supported – to build their personal resilience, and to grow their resident group and delegate to others so that they don’t burn out. With capacity building and mentoring, there is also the opportunity to grow community champions into community development workers and community leaders – with England’s professional community development skill base under-resourced, this is an opportunity that should be captured.

And all those working towards making Lawrence Weston an even better place –

The Board of Ambition Lawrence Weston

Norman Routledge
Stephen Hall
Jacki Crouch
Terri Booker
Val Pospischil
Jordan Hudd
Daphne Chikwere
Bee Thornhill
Norman Laity
Jamie Siggers

The Big Local Partnership

Jacki Crouch
Ann Hawker
Terri Booker
Iain Stevens
Jim Black
Norman Laity
Amy Smith
Roger Sabido
John Woolnough
Norman Routledge
Daphne Chikwere

Ambition Community Energy

Mark Pepper
Roger Sabido
David Tudgey
Charles Gamble
Andrew Garrad
Wilf Burke
Marie Bryant
Norman Routledge

And the 260 resident members of Ambition Lawrence Weston.

Appendix

Methodology

We reviewed existing literature which tells the story of Lawrence Weston, including previous case studies of individual projects and videos from host organisations.

CSE also featured Lawrence Weston in our previous work for the Onshore Wind Guidelines (2021), so two interview transcripts from this work were included in the review.

Interviews were then conducted with a number of stakeholders who have been involved in Lawrence Weston’s activities (see below). We are aware there are many more people who have contributed to the successful community development in the area who we did not speak with.

Cllr. Donald Alexander	Councillor for Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston, Cabinet Member for Transport, Bristol City Council
Donna Sealey	Lead for Community Development and Engagement, Ambition Lawrence Weston
Mark Pepper	Development Manager, Ambition Lawrence Weston
Richard Lowe	Bristol City Leap
Roger Sabido	Local resident, member of neighbourhood planning forum and board member of Ambition Community Energy
Dan Stone	Senior Planner, Centre for Sustainable Energy
Andy O’Brien	Bristol Energy Cooperative

Transcripts from Onshore Wind Guidelines project (2021)

David Tudgey	Ambition Community Energy CIC and Bristol Energy Network
Mark Pepper	Development Manager Ambition Lawrence Weston

Glossary

Co-housing

Co-housing is an intentional community of private homes clustered around shared space. Co-housing developments are usually 10-40 households, with the development designed to strike a balance between privacy and community, to make interactions easy, and with residents as the decision-makers.

Neighbourhood Plan

A neighbourhood plan is a statutory plan document, which sets out the vision and planning policies for a specified neighbourhood. It is written by the local community and can only be adopted once it has been voted in through a community referendum.

Community Plan

A community plan is a non-statutory document written by the local community. These plans vary, but often their purpose is to outline the community’s key priorities for improving quality of life for residents, and to detail objectives and actions for how to meet these priorities.

Development Trust

A development trust is a community owned and led organisation, engaged in the economic, environmental and social regeneration of a defined area or community.

Passive housing

Passive Housing is housing built to a highly energy efficient standard, with attention paid to maximising indoor comfort and acoustic insulation.



centre for
sustainable
energy

Local Trust
trusting
local
people

LAWRENCE WESTON: THE JOURNEY TO NET ZERO