

# COMMUNITIES LIVING SUSTAINABLY: ENERGY LEARNING SUMMARY

## About Communities Living Sustainably

Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) is a £12 million programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Twelve communities in England have received up to £1million to help deal with the potential impact of climate change and build the sustainability and resilience of their local community. The programme will run for five years, with these communities providing inspiration to other communities across England and sharing what they have learned with each other.

## The Groundwork UK Learning Partnership

The Groundwork UK Learning Partnership is made up of five organisations each with expertise in tackling climate change and helping communities to live more sustainably. The partnership comprises Groundwork UK, The Energy Saving Trust, The Federation of City Farms and Gardens, The New Economics Foundation and Building Research Establishment (BRE). This partnership has been brought together to encourage and support the funded local communities to capture and share any learning from their projects.

## Key Findings

This learning summary shares information about the work CLS projects are carrying out around energy. Most of the CLS projects have linked to pre-existing plans, aspirations and sustainable energy projects within their communities. This is encouraging and has highlighted the range and scope of aspirations around energy within communities across the UK.



## Communities believe changing individual behaviour is vital to achieve a more sustainable community, but some are finding it difficult to access funding to install energy saving measures.

Projects are providing free advice and in some cases installing energy saving measures to householders to encourage them to use less energy and live more sustainably. They are engaging local people through events and through volunteer advisor services such as the [Groundwork Green Doctor initiative](#). These advisors visit properties to guide people on how to save energy and thus cut their fuel and water bills. Projects who are able to refer people into existing schemes are having success whilst others appear to reflect experience elsewhere that the transition from widely available grants and discounts, under the well-established CERT (Carbon Emissions Reduction Target) programme, to loans under the Green Deal (and grants targeted at fuel poor households under ECO) has been challenging.

**Case study:** One Planet Middlesbrough, supported by £1 million from Communities Living Sustainably, is focusing on improving energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty in the town. The project runs training, awareness events and advice sessions which direct residents into an existing Middlesbrough Council scheme with accredited installers and access to financial support for energy-saving measures. So far, One Planet Middlesbrough's team of energy champions has advised around 1,000 households, leading to the installation of more than 800 fuel-saving measures. These measures could lead to lifetime fuel bill savings well in excess of £1.3 million and carbon dioxide savings of almost 5,300 tonnes. OPM is concentrating its efforts on deprived communities, those with low educational attainment and people living with a variety of health issues. For more information about One Planet Middlesbrough click [here](#).

**CLS funding is proving valuable to investigate potential renewable energy schemes.** Several projects are conducting feasibility studies to investigate the potential to develop and install renewable energy schemes in their area. Projects identified that the high cost of conducting feasibility studies can be a barrier to progressing community energy projects and so the opportunity to use CLS funding to progress this has been beneficial. Most projects aim to have renewable energy systems installed by the end of their CLS project activity and are beginning to turn their attention to developing finance packages for their installation.

**Case Study:** Sustainable Sheppey has taken an innovative approach to renewable energy by engaging their community at the conception stage. The project ran a community energy workshop aimed at consulting local people about which renewable energy technologies should be developed on the island and how. The workshop included sessions on the different technologies available with key resource and constraints data presented. Background information on the technologies was provided and facilitators were on hand to answer questions. Participants were then encouraged to highlight opportunities and constraints and express their views about the different technologies. This approach empowers local people by engaging them at inception and giving them input into the design of the scheme. For more information about Sustainable Sheppey click [here](#).

**Community groups working to combat the effects of climate change and improve their energy efficiency are increasingly turning to each other for advice and support as other sources of free help disappear.** In recent years the scope and availability of free and impartial advice on energy at community level has reduced, for example with the end of the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre Network and austerity measures impacting many council-funded advice services. Other community groups are therefore one of the few sources of free advice available to groups.

**Case Study:** CLS Energy Network. To facilitate this sharing of advice and best practice between community groups, the CLS programme is establishing an Energy Learning Network. Funded projects emphasised the value of face to face contact with other communities tackling similar issues and this network will give both the CLS funded groups and other interested stakeholders a chance to get together, build relationships and share best practice and lessons learnt from the programme.

**The CLS programme represents an opportunity to learn from a group of diverse communities working on energy projects.** The timescale of CLS, which funds projects for up to five years, not only enables a wider range of activity to be undertaken than single year funding, but also allows time for measureable impact (e.g. energy efficiency measures installed and renewable energy systems installed or at least consented) to occur in time for evaluation. The results of this longer term approach could be used to inform development of future national government programmes.

**The CLS Energy Network will follow the progress of these projects and continue to publish its findings. To be added to the mailing list please email [helen.phillips@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:helen.phillips@groundwork.org.uk)**

