

*TRANSITION*STROUD

Eco-Renovation Open Homes for a Sustainable Future

A report looking at the hugely successful Stroud Open Homes event in September 2008, which saw over 1,150 visits to the eco-exhibition and 12 eco-homes

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Contents

1. What was this event?
2. Why we organised the event?
3. How we organised the event?
4. What feedback from the event?
5. Has Open Homes reduced carbon?
6. Three recommendations and future plans

Notes

1. What was this event?

The aim of the Open Homes weekend was to:

- offer people the opportunity to see what lower carbon technologies could be applied to homes and gain practical advice from home owners
- increase interest and demand in insulation and energy efficiency as well as Low and Zero Carbon technologies to reduce Stroud District's carbon footprint

Transition Stroud (TS) organised the opening of 12 homes over a weekend to demonstrate and give advice about renewables and energy efficiency measures. Over 750 visits were made to the homes and over 400 to the exhibition at the opening of the country's first carbon neutral village hall.

Many participants say they have been inspired to take energy efficiency measures and consider renewables in their own homes after the weekend.

The 12 homes available to visit varied from what has been described as 'the country's most energy efficient house' to ordinary homes including old cottages, newer 'Barratt-style' homes and homes where building was still in progress. Measures on show included various Solar Thermal and PV, different insulation measures including internal and external cladding, wood pellet boilers, a sun tube, rainwater harvesting, a groundbreaking Sustainable Urban Drainage System, a residential wind turbine, green roofs, lime mortar and plasters, eco-paints and the country's first two co-housing schemes where residents have some shared facilities.

In Randwick Village Hall at the exhibition there were some suppliers, information about other Transition projects and a stall giving advice on grants from the South West Energy Agency (SWEA). Visitors also had an opportunity to view the measures taken to make this the hall carbon neutral like the ground source heat pump and PV.

The whole event was organised by volunteers and all the homeowners kindly volunteered to show people around their own homes. Many hours were freely donated to this project: publicising the event, putting together the informative Open Homes web site, organising teas at the Village Hall, putting together the leaflets and many other tasks. Thanks must go to all those who helped make the event so hugely successful.

2. Why we organised the event?

Transition Stroud are working to achieve greater community resilience that we will need to thrive through the coming years of climate change and peak oil. It is generally accepted that the UK will need to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% on 1990 levels by 2050 to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change.

In the month following the Open Homes event the new Department of Energy and Climate Change has committed the UK to an 80% cut. Furthermore the Climate Change Bill, the first of it's kind in the world, enshrined that target in law with annual targets and five year carbon budgets to ensure emissions are cut.

The household sector represents 27 per cent of our total emissions and achieving deep cuts here is an imperative. Of the homes we will inhabit in 2050, around 80 per cent are already standing today and these have to be the main focus for carbon-reduction policies. In discussions about this within Transition Stroud and amongst friends and family members we found a thirst for knowledge of 'eco-renovation', yet many people are unsure about how to proceed.

This is similar to other findings. Oxfordshire for example held one of the countries first 'Open Home' weekends. Their evaluation demonstrated a clear interest in eco-renovation, and the need for local information and experience sharing. They found a

third of those surveyed would like to meet with others intending to eco-reno-vate their homes.

Bandura's Social Learning theory suggests that people learn through observing others' behaviour, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviours. Eco-renovation is a combination of behaviours and actions. Behaviours (e.g. switching lights off) can be significantly reinforced through one-off actions, such as insulating, or eco-renovating all or part of a house. Many eco-renovators say that their initial eco-renovation activities come about through a specific opportunity, e.g. moving house or replacing a bathroom. Given this opportunistic nature, it is important to provide access to a wide range of eco-renovation possibilities.

Interest in greener technologies has never been higher and Stroud's reputation as a 'greener' place to live The idea of 'Open Homes' is familiar to many Stroud residents who have visited the hugely successful Open Studios where some 200 artists exhibit in many homes across the District for two weekends in June.

3. How we organised the event?

1. Event organisers: A core group of volunteers from the Transition Energy group met on several occasions to put together the plans for the weekend of 'Open Homes for a sustainable future'. They also met with many others like homeowners, designers, Village Hall Committee members and District Council officers to organise the event.

2. Homeowners: 12 home owners were identified who were willing to participate for parts or all of the weekend. They were approached to give as wide a variety as possible of eco-renovation renovation measures. Each homeowner was contacted and details obtained about the measures they had taken including directions, opening times, permission to put info on the web site and leaflet and where appropriate have contact from the media. Homeowners signed letters saying that

they agreed to participate in the event. Over 750 visits were made to the 12 homes, the most visiting Tranquility House which some 250 people visited during the weekend.

3. Randwick Village Hall opening and exhibition: We organised with the Randwick Village Hall Committee on the Saturday the official opening day of the first carbon-neutral village hall in the country with ground source heat pump and PV. Speeches were made to a crowd of some 150 people before the ribbon was cut and people went inside the hall. In the hall there was a cafe run by the W.I. and exhibitions of advice and grant info from representatives of the Severn Wye Energy Agency, Transition Stroud, Ecovision UK, Solarsense and Greenshop Solar and Rainwater harvesting. Over 400 people visited the exhibition, probably more than half coming to see the new hall and then spending time at the stalls.

4. Walks and Cycle routes: In addition to the homes opening over the weekend two walks were also planned by Debbie Hewitt to incorporate those homes as part of Stroud Town's Walking Festival. A cycle tour was also devised and led by James Beecher and Imogen Shaw of the campaign group Stroud Bicycology.

5. Sponsorship and volunteer time secured:

- Volunteer time of Transition Stroud volunteers: this included developing the idea, contacting householders, draft leaflet design, publicity and web site design time. On the day volunteers helped manage the stall, visit the homeowners to see how the event was going and in one case support a homeowner as they were unable to be present all the time.
- Stroud Walking Festival Walks promoted the eco-renovation walks and our event
- Green Shop provided funding for the web site
- Stroud District Council gave £650.00 for part of the leaflet design costs and 3,000 leaflets to be printed and 30 laminated signs and several colour poster

- Bicycology organised the cycle route for the weekend
- Additional posters were printed by Transition Energy group volunteers at their own expense

There were several other offers of some very limited financial support from other suppliers of renewable energy, but there was not time to pursue these as we had agreed that any other sponsors needed approval from Stroud District Council.

6. Publicity:

- Open Homes web site: our high quality Stroud Open Homes web site carried detailed information about the event, the eco-renovations, visit details (directions and parking) along with links to further information: www.stroudopenhomes.org.uk
- Other web sites: we contacted many other web sites, forums and events on web notice boards to advertise the event.
- Print media - we organised a series of various different press releases to local and specialist media and all Parish newsletters.
- Radio - Various media interviews were arranged with BBC Radio Gloucestershire, Stroud FM and Severn Sound. Sadly no TV picked up on the story.
- Leaflets/Posters - the 3,000 leaflets were distributed throughout the District in cafes, Tourist Information Offices and Parish offices plus 300 as inserts in the local Randwick Runner newsletter and through various organisations internal mail systems. Posters were displayed on all the well-used notice boards and needed to be replaced at some sites several times. Direction signs - laminated signs were given to all householders for them to put up to help people find their homes, however some householders did not use the signs for various reasons. Schools Eco-poster competition: a poster competition for children led to over 30 posters from Randwick School children about energy efficiency measures.

These colourful and often thoughtful posters were displayed on the day in the Village Hall.

7. Evaluation: All homes were given evaluation sheets for visitors to complete. Some homes used these and some didn't: 150 entries were completed. See below. All homeowners were also contacted for their feedback and a small gift was made to them for their very generous participation in this scheme.

8. Follow-up: After the weekend Transition Energy group members met to feedback comments which are included in this paper about where the project can go next. We have also been in contact with similar events in Oxfordshire and Brighton to share our experiences. Furthermore following an invitation from Regen SW we completed a nomination form for the Regen South West Green Energy Awards in the category Best Sustainable Energy Community. Randwick Village Hall has since been shortlisted.

4. What feedback from the event?

The huge participation in the weekend has demonstrated a thirst for knowledge of 'eco-renovation' and lower carbon technologies. The homeowners participating said they would have been unable to cope with larger numbers.

1. Feedback from visitors: Most of the homeowners and the exhibition did not participate in requesting feedback from participants on our prepared feedback forms. This was mostly due to being too busy coping with the numbers of visitors. However over 85% of the 150 completed feedback forms said they were inspired to do more in their own homes.

Some of the comments include:

"I had not appreciated that my insulation measures could be improved significantly."

"Plenty of food for thought. Good ideas."

"Most interesting and inspiring."

"A gift to the future."

"Very useful to see the reality of 'greening' a cotswold cottage."

"Good to see we all need to make compromises!"

"Thoroughly thought through. Bravo!"

"Inspiring and elegant and good to see in the airing cupboard!"

"Excellent information - especially on 'breathing house'"

"Seeing and touching lime plaster has now clarified how I'm going to approach it in my home."

"All questions answered - I'm ready to eco-renovate!"

"First true domestic solar hybrid system I've seen."

"Great to see the house having appreciated the PV info on the web site."

"Really lovely informative tour - nice to see this kind of thing in amongst all the other homes in this estate - great display and leaflets too."

2. Feedback from homeowners: The 12 'homeowner-pioneers' all noted the huge enthusiasm from participants and a hunger for information about what was possible. One said that 'those attending seemed to be a good cross-section of the community rather than only ecotypes'. Several noted they were exhausted from describing their projects to so many people! Most said they would be happy to participate again in a similar event.

3. Other feedback: SWEA expressed delight at the 'considerable numbers' and nearly ran out of their leaflets. The Women's Institute, who supplied teas at the village hall, were very positive about the day and noted that they also nearly ran out of cakes!

We have also had several phone calls from members of the public asking when the next event will be organised and two suppliers have expressed interest in participating in any future events. One person said they didn't get to any of the

homes but the leaflet and web site alone has prompted them to explore grants and what can be done!

5. Has Open Homes reduced carbon?

It is difficult to estimate the carbon-reduction resulting from this project. However Stroud District Council Sustainability Officers report considerably higher numbers of enquiries regarding renewables following the event.

In Brighton a similar Open Homes project this year had the excellent idea to invite participants to make an eco-pledge. A fifth of visitors participated in pledging and it is estimated carbon savings resulting in the first year from those pledges to be 1,000 tonnes increasing to 4,000 tonnes in three years.

It has also been noted that the extensive press and media coverage of the event has helped to increase awareness of the need to act regarding climate change and rising fuel prices. This awareness also leads to greater support for the other work being done by local Councils and others to tackle climate change.

Both the District Council and the Town Council supported the Stroud Open Homes project and are committed to a whole host of schemes to cut carbon. The District has an aspiration to reduce total CO₂ emissions from all sources by 60% by 2050 and install on average 1.5MW of energy generating capacity per annum until 2020. Several of the homes opening were part of their Target 2050 to cut emissions by 60% in 23 local homes differing in age and type (i).

6. Three recommendations and future plans

This project has demonstrated that it is an excellent way to raise awareness in the community and lead to reductions in CO₂. Homeowners, visitors and suppliers are keen to see a further Open Homes events and there has been suggestions of not just

further weekends but also possibly other events through the year. In this section we make three key recommendations and consider ways forward for future events:

1. Learning from others: We are aware of a handful of other similar 'Open Homes' projects around the country but none that we know about in the South West. We have had contact with two of the projects that are currently both creating guides of how to organise an Open Homes event. An hour long telephone conference is planned for later this month to share information and experiences. This will be important in improving the project.

In Oxfordshire this year there were between 600 up to 700 individuals and very positive feedback from visitors to 20 homes. Generally numbers were slightly better last year for various reasons. 225 visitors completed an evaluation survey. For the Oxfordshire Ideal Green Home Show which was part of the Heritage Open Days, costs included more than 7 days of paid staff time and 9 volunteer days. The exhibition costs included venue hire £400 and stall holders were charged between £20 - £100 to exhibit. A £2 entry donation was suggested. Charges covered a part of the paid worker's time.

In Brighton the Eco Open Houses was a joint project between Brighton Permaculture Trust, Low Carbon Trust and Brighton & Hove City Council. 14 homes opened over the weekend and had 2,500 visits. The event cost £20,000 which was raised from sponsors Legal & General and South East England Regional Assembly. In addition to this there was also 3 months of a full time worker and at each home 2 paid knowledgeable volunteers were made available to support the homeowners.

Recommendation: further discussion with other Open Homes projects to develop best practice like the Eco Pledges in Brighton. To also share our own experiences to encourage other towns to participate.

2. Working with partners: Stroud District Council has plans for promoting measures to tackle climate change. The Council's advisory Climate Change Panel recommended in June 2008 an annual event along the lines of the World Sustainability Days in Wels in Austria to communicate practical measures that can be put in place.

Stroud Town Council have embarked on an Energy Neighbourhoods project to cut household fuel use and have also confirmed their hope to put another Walking Festival on and have suggested some further sharing of publicity with a future Open Homes event.

Suppliers, who did not take part in this event, have expressed an interest in participating in future events. Visitors to the homes have also expressed an interest in talking to suppliers. Oxfordshire have organised a fair which allowed people to talk to many suppliers about their products. This maybe similar to the idea recommended by the Climate Change Panel to Stroud District Council.

Recommendation: Early contact with other agencies to maximise promotion of any future events and explore possibilities of including an eco-renovators fair at the same time as the Open Homes.

3. Funding issues: Transition Stroud have been delighted by the success of the project and the enthusiasm from so many people. However TS has concluded that the huge number of volunteer hours, particularly by the Co-ordinator could not be repeated in a voluntary capacity. TS is currently not in a position to seek funding for this project but would be keen to help in any future event.

Recommendation: to find a lead organisation to co-ordinator the project and seek funds for publicity, web site improvements and paid worker time to organise the event.

Possible ways forward:

1. Vision 21 have recently been reorganised and are uniquely positioned to promote this event and possibly help develop a Countywide participation. They are formally considering taking a role as a lead partner in future Open Homes events.

2. Stroud Valleys Project support local energy project and are also well positioned to help deliver future Open Homes events. They have also been approached to see if they are interested in taking a lead role.

3. If neither of these options are viable then we will need to seek other possible solutions if we wish to see this event continue. It will be important to gain some indication of funding possibilities so that we can appoint a Coordinator for next years events. TS has concluded that without funding for a Coordinator then future similar Open Homes events look unlikely.

TS would welcome comments on this report from homeowners, participants and other parties involved in the project. We would also welcome ideas and help as to how to ensure take this project is able to build on the success of this first event.

Notes

(i) Project enhances existing policies of SDC

This project directly meets many of Stroud District Councils policies including one of the key priorities of the Corporate Delivery Plan (2007-2011): “helping the community to reduce Carbon Dioxide emissions and adapt to the consequences of climate change”. The Environment, particularly the threat of climate change, was also considered the top issue locally in the Councils household surveys.

The Environment Strategy sets out various ways the Council seeks to tackle climate change and energy. The Council’s Community Aspiration is to reduce total carbon dioxide emissions from all sources by 60% by 2050 and install on average 1.5MW of energy generating capacity per annum up until 2020. The Council also states it “is

committed to achieving its objective of improving the energy efficiency of all the housing in the District and is pursuing this through a combination of working in partnership with other agencies, schools and local businesses, as well as provision of grant aid for energy efficiency improvements”.

The Council’s measures include investing £400,000 up to 2010 to move the existing housing stock towards the 40% house model (ie reducing households emissions to the practicable minimum). There is also a ‘one stop shop’ for advice on energy efficiency and micro-generation.

The Climate Change Panel Report to Cabinet on 31st January 2008 set out concerns re future energy supplies, rising energy prices and the latest position on climate change. It raised many points including wanting “to see an increasing move towards decentralised energy solutions that makes sense at household, community and commercial scales.” The Panel made various recommendations including noting the need to look at what ‘incentives’ and ‘support’ can be given to householders to make the required investments and behavioural changes to reduce domestic emissions.

There is increasingly available advice about energy efficiency measures and renewables but there are few opportunities for the valuable experience and information that can be gained by sharing between householders. This project will fill that gap and also we hope prompt wider discussion and action by householders.