

Community Skills for Climate Change

Oundle Transition
Town Group (OTTG)°Climate east
midlandsBackground to the
Community

Oundle is a rural market town of about 6000 people which acts as the commercial and cultural centre for the surrounding villages. This gives an overall population of around 10,000. The area is relatively prosperous with quite a high proportion of retired people. There is little industry in the town; many people commute to work in Peterborough, Northampton or London. Oundle is the educational centre of the region with a large comprehensive school, a middle school and several local primary schools, and also a large independent boarding school with a large junior day-school.

In June 2009 a group of people met informally at the invitation of Revd Tony Hodgson to share their interest in a sustainable lifestyle and their concern about climate change and resource depletion. After a series of monthly discussions, open meetings and visiting speakers, OTTG was

formally constituted on July 9th 2010, with about 100 people showing interest, and a website was created www.oundletransition.org.uk. In March 2011, OTTG, in co-operation with the Oundle Festival of Literature, ran a major event called "How Green is our Oundle?" A variety of stalls, displays and seminars from local people and commercial organisations on food, energy saving, renewable energy and life-style were designed to inform and to challenge. This is OTTG's largest venture to date; some 200 people attended and they plan to hold a similar event fairly soon. Initially, OTTG concentrated on five main areas – energy, food, transport, education and lifestyle. This proved to be too broad a canvas for the active membership of around 35 to cope with. The focus is now more on specific projects. One of these is the promotion of energy saving and the installation of renewable energy schemes in the local area.

Project
Training Voluntary
Energy AssessorsGrant
£3898

Project Aims

The overall aim of the project was to help householders become more aware of their energy consumption and their dependence on fossil fuels, thereby helping them to use less energy and to reduce their carbon footprint. The initial approach was geared to try to help them save money by improved insulation, more efficient use of energy and modified lifestyle.

Although the specific project involved the training of Voluntary Household Energy Assessors (VHEA's) and visits to a specific number of houses, this was seen as only the beginning of an ongoing process. The assessors will continue their work after the project is completed at the end of January 2012. As people become more aware and share their experiences, significant changes should occur within the community.

Achievements

The initial target was to train 7 VHEA's, but 11 volunteered and Oundle School kindly provided the facilities for the training. This was carried out by Caroline Harmon of Marches Energy Agency in late September and early October 2011.

The group created a customised set of documents for use by the assessors. As the main focus was to be on domestic energy use,

www.climate-em.org.uk/projects/community-skills

Community Skills for Climate Change

Oundle Transition
Town Group (OTTG)°Climate east
midlands

the sections dealing with travel and the calculation of an overall carbon footprint per person were made optional, depending on the householders' interests.

42 houses and a local school, Glapthorn C of E Primary School, have been assessed. Reports have been written and delivered to the householders and the school. Camilla Sherwin, an OTTG volunteer, has played a vital role here, not only doing the assessment but also speaking on various occasions at assemblies and commissioning the pupils to take home a flyer inviting their parents to a free assessment. She also arranged a thermal imaging audit for the school.

The treasurer, John Flory, was successful in obtaining extra funds (see attached list) which enabled the purchase of an infra red (IR) camera (£3000) in November 2011. David Wood volunteered to be trained to use the camera and with his technical ability and enormous enthusiasm he has managed to complete the 21 surveys, as required by the project.

This is a considerable achievement since he was unable to start the project before early December and each survey and write up took about three hours! The remaining householders who have not had an IR survey as yet have been offered the option of having one in the near future. The IR surveys have proved to be an invaluable complement to the assessors' reports; one picture seems far more convincing than many words! David is now training others in the use of the camera.

As the VHEA's have conducted their assessments their own knowledge has grown substantially and they are now even more enthusiastic; it has been an exciting journey.

The people whose homes have been assessed have found the experience very worthwhile, and have become enthusiastic supporters of the project. Their recommendations should provide a higher profile and increased momentum within the community towards a decreasing carbon footprint.

Challenges Faced / Lessons Learned

Groundwork East Midlands awarded the grant to OTTG some three months later than the other seven in the scheme. It was not possible to begin training until late September, so there was less than four months to complete the assessments. Furthermore, project delivery time was even more reduced by the fact that most householders who wanted an audit couldn't find the necessary couple of hours in the very busy weeks around Christmas and the New Year. There was also the unforeseen problem of one member of the group having to go into hospital for a serious operation before having the opportunity to complete an assessment. However, despite the fact that a good number of the group have demanding jobs, with long working hours, the "team spirit" was such as to surmount these challenges.

Initially many of the VHEA's worked in pairs in order to share their knowledge and experience and to boost their confidence. This proved to be very helpful indeed, but inevitably took more time. Many assessments took two hours or more at the house and writing up often doubled this.

Some VHEA's found that they lacked sufficient expertise to understand and advise on older boilers and complex electrical systems and recognised the need for further training.

Although a standard set of documentation was created by the group for use by those conducting the surveys, it was decided that each person should write their



www.climate-em.org.uk/projects/community-skills

Community Skills for Climate Change

Oundle Transition
Town Group (OTTG)°Climate east
midlands

report in a style that most suited them and the client. This put considerably more pressure on those writing the reports, but tuning the report to each person's circumstances proved very worthwhile.

Energy monitors have been particularly successful. Some people wanted to use them for more than the month and have bought their own. The group had a dozen monitors at their disposal, and realise that they could have used more. The eco-kettles were not so popular. The main recommendation for an eco-kettle is that it enables you to boil just one cup of water. However, contrary to the group's expectation, a good number of households that were audited already had a kettle that would do just that.

The response to leaflets and posters has been disappointing, (is offering something "free" a cause for suspicion?). Members of OTTG delivered leaflets to houses in the town and handed them out at local

markets. People were also contacted individually via Volunteer Action drivers and be-frienders, through Oundle School Community Action, through churches and at retired people's events. Yet despite this widespread publicity less than 25 % of clients approached OTTG directly. Most have come from one-to-one contact with the VHEA's.

It has been difficult to access younger couples with children or people of a lower economic status and yet these are the very ones who it is felt might find an assessment most helpful.

The majority of those visited were already "energy aware", especially those who have lived through the more frugal 1940's and 50's. The visits helped to prioritise what they might do next. Improvements will be incremental, not dramatic.

Initially the reports spoke of "suggestions" and "recommendations" and the

householders, while pleased to receive them, did not appear to be taking them up quickly. As experience and confidence have been gained, the wording has become more direct and persuasive, highlighting the need for action! It is hoped that the follow-up visits will provide an increased incentive!

In the Future

OTTG's plan is to continue conducting household energy audits and IR surveys for the foreseeable future, meeting the need wherever it declares itself.

On the follow-up visits it is hoped that the survey can be extended, in some cases, to include the overall carbon footprint per person which would include travel etc.

OTTG hopes to make the public buildings in Oundle more energy efficient. The Town Council has asked the group to do energy surveys of their buildings and will

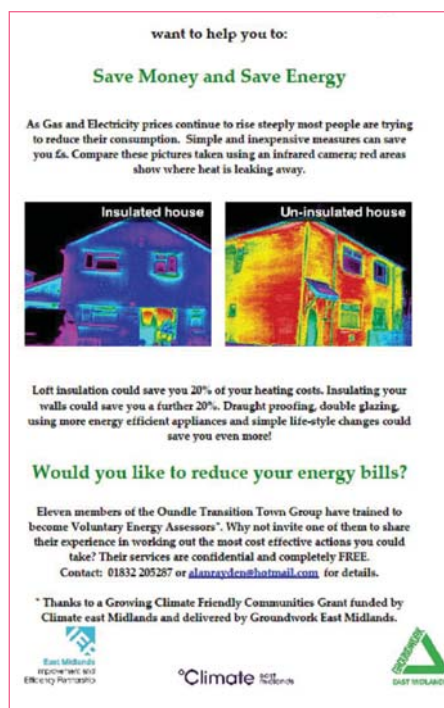


www.climate-em.org.uk/projects/community-skills

Community Skills for Climate Change

Oundle Transition Town Group (OTTG)

°Climate east midlands



publicise their work, and there is a prospect of working further with local schools

A lot of new estates are planned in the Oundle area. The energy surveys have highlighted how difficult and expensive it is to retrofit buildings. OTTG will focus on trying to influence all new building to be of the highest possible standard in terms of energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources.

Broadening the range of publicity methods is of high importance. Possibilities are to make use of the local radio station run by Oundle School and to arrange for minibus groups to visit "show homes" which some councils and housing associations have produced as inspiring and instructive examples of just what can be done to retrofit a basic house to a very high standard.

Contact Information

OTTG Treasurer

J.W.Flory

T: 01832 273811

E: jandcflory@tiscali.co.uk

OTTG Secretary

A.G.Rayden

T: 01832 205287

E: alanrayden@hotmail.com

Useful Web Addresses

Oundle Transition Town Group

www.oundletransition.org.uk

Plan LoCaL

www.planlocal.org.uk

Planning for Climate Change

www.planningforclimatechange.org.uk

Climate East Midlands

www.climate-em.org.uk

Groundwork East Midlands

www.eastmidlands.groundwork.org.uk

List of Grants

The grant of £3898 from the Growing Climate Friendly Communities included £1000 for equipment in addition to the energy monitors. Sophie Harton, the project supervisor, suggested that OTTG could put the £1000 towards an infra-red camera.

In late November 2011, OTTG heard that the Northamptonshire Community Foundation had granted them £2000 from their "Surviving Winter Fund" to enable them to purchase the camera.

This then released a grant of £500 from the Oundle Town Council and £110 from Cllr. Rupert Reichhold's "Member Empowerment Fund".

Earlier in the year OTTG had been successful with their entry for "Improving your Patch Awards" given by the Northamptonshire Environmental Forum. They won the East Northamptonshire Award and the County Award, amounting to £550.

The total of all grants awarded is £7058.



www.climate-em.org.uk/projects/community-skills