



## Community engagement in Low Carbon Communities - Why, how and when?

### The transition to low carbon development

The need to move to a low carbon economy and society has become increasingly widely accepted. The Climate Change Act 2008 committed the UK to achieving a cut of 80% in national carbon emissions by 2050 and the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan 2009 proposed an interim target of 34% reduction by 2020. These targets have been taken on board by the Coalition Government. But they cannot be achieved without a step change in energy efficiency and a major shift to the use of renewable energy, as increasingly important components of community-based planning and delivery of sustainable neighbourhoods.

Domestic energy consumption accounts for 28% of carbon emissions. Thus the government is carrying forward the previous administration's commitment to achieving Zero Carbon new housing production by 2016 by phased increases in building regulations

standards. In parallel the government and pioneering local authorities are developing a wide range of incentives to encourage homeowners and tenants to invest in energy efficiency and micro-generation of renewable energy through the installation of solar thermal and photo-voltaic panels and ground and air source heat pumps. A significant proportion of this activity is targeted at poor people living in poor neighbourhoods, in order to reduce 'fuel poverty' whilst reducing carbon emissions.

The transformation of the housing stock from a major source of carbon emissions to a major component of a decentralised system for generating renewable energy is now underway. However, if we are to achieve Low Carbon Communities, many other issues have to be addressed, notably local transport, food production and consumption, neighbourhood/district low carbon heating systems, together with much improved water and waste management.

### Neighbourhood eco-retrofit matrix: opportunities and choices

	Buildings e.g. Improved energy efficiency of dwellings and community buildings	Local energy generation e.g. Household micro-generation & community level installations	Waste e.g. Reduce, repair/reuse and recycle domestic waste	Local transport e.g. Electric car clubs, cycle-ways and walk-ways	Water efficiency e.g. Reduce domestic consumption and reuse grey water	Green infrastructure e.g. Sustainable urban drainage, allotments, green roofs, street trees	Information technology e.g. Enhancing internet access
Reduce carbon emissions	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Increase resilience to climate change	●	●			●	●	
Reduce fuel bills & fuel poverty	●	●					
Improved energy security		●					
Increased efficiency in resource use	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Improved biodiversity						●	
Improved health	●			●		●	
Local green jobs created	●	●	●				
Local economies strengthened	●	●					
Increased value and quality of neighbourhood	●			●		●	
Reduced crime / fear of crime				●			
Improved community capacity				●		●	●

Source: Sustainable Development Commission, 2010. *The Future is Local: Empowering communities to improve their neighbourhoods*



## **WHY community engagement in the move to Low Carbon Communities**

A major programme of LCC's is needed, but can only be achieved through the participation of hundreds of thousands of individual households living in Carbon Conscious Communities. Community engagement is essential to move low carbon neighbourhood development and eco-retrofitting from the margins into the mainstream.

Communities in which developers are proposing significant new private housing development will be encouraged through the new Neighbourhood Plans processes to engage with developers to minimise the carbon footprint of the new housing, as a vital part of the process of ensuring high quality provision of neighbourhood infrastructure such as community centres, neighbourhood parks and health facilities

Social housing landlords are now giving much higher priority to the eco-retrofitting of their housing. But the targeted carbon reductions will only be achieved if the tenants are carbon conscious, for example in the way they use their heating and cooling systems and white goods. Moreover, the transition from social housing estate to Low Carbon Community requires an eco-oriented neighbourhood development process in which residents are full partners. Carbon conscious Tenants and Residents' Organisations are needed to initiate carbon reduction initiatives and support initiatives of landlords and other agencies, particularly local authorities.

In the case of privately owned housing, it is the residents, individually and collectively, who are the key players. Government is developing a framework of financial incentives to encourage investment by individual home owners, but the issue of take-up is crucial. Owners are more likely to invest if they see their neighbours investing which is why both central and local government are now promoting area-based, neighbourhood approaches to eco-retrofitting. Four decades of experience of neighbourhood regeneration programmes have demonstrated that effective community engagement is crucial, both to encourage owners' individual investment in their homes, but also to collectively develop, promote and implement the wider range of

actions to deliver an upgraded neighbourhood. This will be the case with the new generation of eco-retrofitting driven neighbourhood programmes.

## **HOW do we secure community engagement in delivering low carbon new development and eco-retrofitting?**

Effective community engagement will need to draw on the generic principles and an ever increasing range of methods, increasingly implemented through the collective creation of a community engagement strategy. These principles and methods will need to be applied in the specific context of carbon reduction/fuel poverty reduction driven neighbourhood programmes.

It will also be important to draw on the specific experience, albeit limited, of eco-oriented, participatory neighbourhood planning and development which has evolved since the initiation of Local Agenda 21 programmes in the 1990s.

Community Planning for Low Carbon Communities is emerging either by adding a low carbon dimension to existing community-led neighbourhood planning and development work, or reducing carbon emissions is the issue around which new neighbourhood initiatives are organised and are a platform for the development of a wider neighbourhood process to deliver sustainable communities.

## **WHEN do we start ?**

We need to start planning for Low Carbon Communities now. The new system of Neighbourhood Plans will be operational when the Localism Bill becomes an Act at the end of this year. Some incentives for energy efficiency and micro-generation are already in place and the new Green Deal will be put in place in Autumn 2012. This workshop aims to help participants anticipate the potential and grasp the opportunities provided by these and other relevant changes so that the transition to Low Carbon Communities can be kick-started through community-led action in neighbourhoods across the country.