

Power to our neighbourhoods: towards integrated local sustainable energy solutions Learning from success

Briefing paper



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Research summary

A low carbon future for the UK depends on local solutions. Energy saving measures, small-scale renewable energy generation and collective behaviour change, at a local, neighbourhood level, are vital. This briefing paper draws on current best practice to demonstrate what better integration and coordination of local sustainable energy solutions can achieve and makes recommendations as to how to scale up and replicate success.

Key conclusions

'One-size does not fit all.'

The accomplishments of Ashden Award winners and other practitioners are often the result of innovative, entrepreneurial, partnership approaches, based on local intelligence. Success is often achieved in spite of, not because of, the existing policy framework.

Area-based energy efficiency initiatives are an excellent model for delivering emissions reductions at the neighbourhood scale.

They deliver cost-effective take up of simple insulation measures. They also deliver wider benefits, such as local job creation.

Area-based approaches could be greatly enhanced if integrated with other successful approaches.

Integrating area-based approaches with approaches that empower communities to take action, develop local energy supply and generation and build local supply chains, would provide a more holistic approach to emissions reduction and create lasting momentum and community engagement.

Enabling factors

An impartial 'hub' organisation

A locally trusted organisation that can orchestrate activity, is trusted by the communities it is working with and is skilled in bringing together and working with local partners.

Local authority involvement

Local authorities have often played an important, if not central, role in the delivery of local sustainable energy initiatives.

Partnership working

All of the successful initiatives that we have reviewed have involved extensive partnership working.

Developing a local supply chain

One of the successes of the initiatives reviewed has been their ability to work with leading sustainable energy businesses and to develop local supply chains.

Green entrepreneurs

Catalytic individuals or organisations – often locally based – that provide the drive, dynamism and creative spark to kick-start and develop an initiative.

Customer care

Being flexible in meeting the needs of householders and responsive to their complaints.

Creating income streams

Developing independent income streams based on the ownership of key assets – such as renewable energy generating plant – can fund wider neighbourhood efforts.

Culture change

Local sustainable energy initiatives with a strong community element can change collective behaviour, beliefs and value systems, galvanising social action on wider emissions reduction.

Building on existing communities

Tapping into existing community strengths can increase buy-in and take-up of initiatives.

Community leadership and momentum

Empowering communities to devise and lead work on emissions reduction can lead to solutions that fit the local context and are better than top-down programmes. This can also result in a longer-term legacy of community action

Utilising trusted individuals and known networks

Successful area-based action is based on existing trusted relationships with local individuals and networks.



Workmen installing a solar thermal panel on the roof of Pinmore ceramics gallery. They have received advice from the Energy Agency Ayrshire.



Recycling cardboard at South Liverpool Commercials after advice on energy and waste savings from ENWORKS.

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The Ashden Awards wish to acknowledge the support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation in making this work possible.



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Key recommendations

The new Government intends to be the greenest ever. It wants to empower neighbourhoods to take social action. This creates an unmissable opportunity to set-up a framework that will ensure area-based approaches are right at the heart of the UK's transition to a low carbon economy. The report makes a number of recommendations about how to go about this.

Dialogue

Open a dialogue with Ashden Award winners and other local sustainable energy practitioners to develop a model for enhanced area-based approaches.

Big Society

Help to create the 'Big Society' through expanding support for community capacity-building to deliver local sustainable energy.

Finance

Use a range of finance-related initiatives, such as the expansion of competitive grant funding, using the new green investment bank to promote integrated local energy initiatives, loan guarantees for community organisations, pay-as-you-save mechanisms and FIT and RHI payments for neighbourhood renewable energy projects.

Local authority mandate

Build on NI186 and the Local Carbon Framework pilots to ensure that there is a mandate in place to get local authorities to work with communities and businesses to reduce emissions in their area.

A full list of recommendations can be found in the main report.



Installing cavity wall insulation in Kirklees, Yorkshire.

About the Ashden Awards for Sustainable Energy

The Ashden Awards for Sustainable Energy were founded in 2001 to reward and encourage the widespread use of local sustainable energy in the UK and the developing world in order to reduce carbon emissions and improve lives. UK Ashden Award winners, numbering more than 40, are delivering innovative local sustainable energy solutions through renewable energy, energy efficiency measures and behaviour change. They are drawn from sectors including small businesses, local authorities, charities and schools.

The Ashden Awards
Allington House
150 Victoria Street
London
SW1E 5AE

Telephone: + 44 (0)20 7410 7055
Email: simon.brammer@ashdenawards.org
www.ashdenawards.org

Registered Charity No. 1104153



Engaging community groups is critical to the success of MEA's Low Carbon Communities programme.