

RE-ENERGISING COMMUNITIES SEMINAR REPORT

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Over 50 people attended this seminar on Re-energising Communities in Buckhaven Community Centre on March 12th 2010. The seminar asked: "How can Local Authorities help Communities reduce energy use and shift to renewables?"

INTRODUCTION:

This seminar - and accompanying ones on transport, food and community - aim to help the research team from St Andrews and Dundee Universities to co-design (in partnership with Fife Council) a strategy for Local Authorities to help communities reduce their carbon emissions.

Joe Fitzpatrick (Head of Local and Community Services at Fife Council) introduced the history of Buckhaven Community Centre and Buckhaven itself, explaining that what we are attempting to achieve is part of a far broader history of community building.

Research team members, Rehema White [\[link\]](#) and Justin Kenrick [\[link\]](#), introduced the research project and the global context of climate change and peak oil, the national context of Scottish emission reduction targets, the way in which UK and Scottish legislation encourages Councils to help achieve these targets, and the way Fife Council is seeking to support existing community carbon reduction initiatives, as well as seeking to encourage initiatives in more deprived areas in ways which can immediately benefit communities themselves.

Presentations from communities and those from the council were all very strong, and some very clear strategies emerged in relation to how council and communities can work together on carbon reduction, regeneration and community building.

COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

Presentations by Communities active on Energy reduction and production:

Representatives from communities who are tackling energy issues in very different ways provided examples of community initiatives by addressing three questions: How did we start up? What do we do? How have we engaged with Local Authority/ How can they help us?

- **David Stutchfield** (ENLEN - East Neuk and Landward Energy Network) – Working through community council's towards reducing energy use
- **Tom Morton** (North Howe Transition Toun) – A transition initiative approach: sketcingh a different future through practical action today [\[link\]](#)
- **Neil Anderson** (Newburgh Community Trust) – Community Power: Energy from the Wind [\[link\]](#)

ENLEN: WORKING WITH COMMUNITY COUNCILS TO REDUCE ENERGY USE

David Stutchfield (ENLEN - East Neuk and Landward Energy Network)
("How to start an initiative without friends!")

How ENLEN Started, and Local Authority Involvement:

David highlighted the key role Locality Managers play in enabling such initiatives to get off the ground. As someone working on Energy issues at St Andrews University it was clear that energy prices had been rising 15% a year over the last years, and he and his wife had reduced their own energy bills by 50% partly by placing a solar panel on their roof. Many people had stopped to ask them about their panel and they realised there was huge interest in renewables in the area. Aware of the Climate Challenge funding (CCF) available to communities seeking to reduce their carbon emissions, they spoke at the Community Forum that brings together all the community councils for the East Neuk. They proposed transport, food and renewable energy projects, but the one that the forum responded to was one focusing on insulation and reducing household bills. A management team was formed - comprising of David and Georgina Stutchfield, the Locality Manager, the Chair of the Community Forum, and the Chair of Voluntary Organisations North East Fife (VONEF) supported by Fife Council - which put forward a CCF bid.

What ENLEN Does:

CCF funding has enabled ENLEN to employ an energy specialist as the coordinator, plus 6 energy champions with local knowledge who then trained up to be able to provide energy advice. The CCF described ENLEN as securing £212,903 from the 4th round of the CCF for a: "Community-based energy efficiency program which will provide local solutions, including energy audits, support and advice as well as enabling increased uptake of the various schemes currently on offer for cavity and loft insulation, draught proofing, new double glazing, heating controls and replacement boiler systems."

They held displays, visited houses, provided advice, took infrared photos of 2,300 houses, amongst the 8,500 households and 13,000 people in the East Neuk. Where some could afford to take measures such as insulation and others were in receipt of benefits and so could have such measures taken for them, the project had originally intended to secure funding to help those in the middle to be able to afford to take such measures. However the CCF funding is not permitted to aid individual households and so ENLEN's ambition had to be scaled back before the bid went in.

ENLEN's Future:

Now the community councils are interested exploring the possibility of community owned renewable energy production. Some areas are looking at the possibilities for community owned wind turbines which could end up returning £50-100,000 a year to each community each year. Different communities are exploring this at different speeds. David was interested in meeting with the key planner from Fife Council who deals with turbines and who, as it happened, was in his audience at the seminar!

NHTT: A TRANSITION INITIATIVE APPROACH: TRYING TO SKETCH A DIFFERENT FUTURE THROUGH PRACTICAL ACTION TODAY

Tom Morton (NHTT - North Howe Transition Toun)
("Starting an initiative by getting a group of friends together")

How NHTT Began:

There wasn't actually an area called North Howe, but it was the name no-one objected to being used to describe the area of Collesie, Letham, Monimail and Giffordton; an area of 20 square miles, 289 homes and 850 people. NHTT began with a bunch of friends interested in the Transition model, wanting to do something about climate change and their environment. We spoke to local people and found out what they were interested in doing. It became apparent that, partly because it was a rural area, people are aware of the environment and receptive to change. NHTT has been going for 2 years, has 50 members and a network of 300 people. It has found the most popular way of engaging people has been through food (and drink).

Key aspects: (i) NHTT is close to the community; (ii) has no vested interest, no history (and doesn't want to be too closely associated with the council); (iii) shows people it can make a difference to what is important in their lives (communication focuses not on saving the planet but on cutting bills); (iv) has a big vision but takes small steps;

What NHTT Does:

There is a very active food group looking at developing sustainable local food systems, a transport group looking at developing local sustainable transport, and an energy group (which Tom's talk focused on).

NHTT first sought funding to identify what its community wanted and to look at how that might best be achieved. In the 4th round of the CCF, NHTT secured £92,755 to: "Engage the community via door-to-door surveys, carbon foot printing and public consultation and training events on food, transport and eco renovation; Community film and pub nights with visiting speakers; Practical projects: local bulk garden-supplies centre, community apple press; and Feasibility studies to improve local footpaths, bike routes, and car sharing schemes." This funding also developed a more detailed energy project.

NHTT then, in the 5th round of the CCF, secured £114,361 funding for its CaRB (Carbon Reduction in Buildings) Project of "energy-saving measures coordinated across the community to reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty. By developing broad partnerships, the project will increase social resilience and local control in the face of an unpredictable energy future."

People are very worried by their rising energy bills. CaRB's door to door survey had a 60% response rate and found that 63% of people live in pre-1900 buildings (81% in pre-1980s, pre insulation buildings), 31% are in fuel poverty, 63% have uninsulated solid walls, 70% have no mains gas and rely on high carbon, expensive fuels (such as oil, LPG or electricity), and 69% were interested in community owned renewables.

As well as bringing in Changeworks, the Energy Savings Trust and Fife Council energy people to help them, NHTT trained 4 local people as energy champions to give energy advice to help people change their own homes. The whole premise of

NHTT is that we are not doing things for people, but helping them do things for themselves - it is empowering change in areas where people often feel powerless.

NHTT's Future:

NHTT's target is 20/20: aiming for 20% of people to make a 20% carbon emissions cut. But we're not just changing peoples' homes, we're changing their minds. NHTT is using the reality of climate change to build community, to turn fear and concern into enthusiasm; attempting to change not just homes but also schools and community halls (e.g. Letham Village Hall spends 40% of its income on its energy bills).

NHTT aims to develop renewables, making use of 600 hectares of woodland in the area, examining the possibility of a Collessie district heating system, conducting a methane feasibility study (800 Mwh of electricity is currently produced from a nearby landfill site, but a further 800 Mwh of heat could be put to community use). Currently landowners and farmers are hard to involve but this will probably change as the possibility of community owned turbines is explored.

Our message to Fife Council is to:

1. Help communities meet their own needs, by providing access to those that have the power to make decisions on local issues
2. Seed fund to foster similar grass roots initiatives which can enable sustainable socio-economic development.
3. Be open to new kinds of partnerships with community groups to achieve common goals

NEWBURGH: COMMUNITY POWER - ENERGY FROM THE WIND

Neil Anderson (Newburgh Community Trust)

("I'm a Fifer through and through - my Dad was a Pittenweemer, my Mum came from Lochgelly - but I have only had the privilege of being in Newburgh for 5 years; deep down I am seriously green but I was dragged kicking and screaming into the Wind Group – don't regret it, great bunch of people")

How Newburgh Wind Project Began:

Newburgh: 1500 households, 2000 people, focused on both Perth and Cupar, with a local primary school and then with Secondary Education at Bell Baxter High School in Cupar. Newburgh has a long history of community engagement and an active Community Trust, Action Group, Orchard Group etc. The catalysts for the Wind Project were the Chair of Newburgh Community Trust, Cllr Andrew Arbuckle and local Environmental Consultant, Duncan Oswald and at all times the Community Trust has driven and overseen the decisions and next steps. The energy and involvement of the Community Trust and the integrated help and guidance of VONEF have been crucial in achieving the successes to date.

What has the Wind Project achieved to date?

In the 5th Round of the CCF, Newburgh Community Trust's Community Wind Project secured £235,850 funding: "to develop a community-owned wind farm with a generating capacity equivalent to the Trust area's electricity consumption. This will help the area to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, while income from the scheme will be used to subsidise local energy efficiency and other environmentally and socially beneficial projects."

The 12 month feasibility study is now in full steam – a met mast is soon to be erected and in the fullness of time it is hoped, subject to the outcome of the feasibility study, that Fife Council will grant Planning Permission for the erection of 3 community controlled turbines, making Newburgh a community-based exemplar for the rest of mainland Scotland.

Newburgh Wind Project's Future Aspirations:

It is estimated that the wind farm can reduce CO2 emissions by around 8,000 tonnes a year, and bring in close to £1 million a year to address fuel poverty/ energy efficiency/community needs.

One of the challenges of success will be how to manage the integration of a substantial income stream into a small community in such a way that it becomes socially cohesive rather than divisive. Structures/templates/best practice parameters will require to be put in place to ensure/measure/enhance full accountability and possibility.

The Wind Group is looking to secure more funding from CCF for a project to combat fuel poverty [and have since been successful in the final round of CCF funding bids], and are looking at a number of carbon reduction initiatives including re-establishing the rail link and making more use the River Tay as a gateway.

DISCUSSION: COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND INEQUALITY

Allen Armstrong (from the CLEAR environmental group in Buckhaven) stated that: Other places are less resourced and need help to be able to even apply to secure funds which wealthier and better resourced places such as Newburgh, East Neuk and North Howe are able to apply for, secure and become even more wealthier through. [CLEAR has since been told that their bid in the final round of CCF funding has been unsuccessful].

David Stutchfield (ENLEN) responded: saying that the problem was that the CCF was reactive and needed to be proactive [presumably by identifying places that need support to be able to make successful bids].

Tom Morton (NHTT) responded: saying that CLEAR needed to find out what people in Buckhaven need, and start from there, that will galvanise people [for example by thinking about how meeting those needs can help reduce carbon emissions and so be a means to secure funding to develop community initiatives].

FIFE COUNCIL

Response from Local Authority teams active in community and energy issues: Representatives from different sectors of Fife Council on their actual and potential roles in community engagement, addressing three questions: What is our job? How do we currently engage with communities? How could we help?

- **Bill Dewar** (Lead Professional in Energy Management) spoke about the many community projects he engages with in his work for the Council and

about reducing the Council's energy use. **[see link]**

- **David McGrath** (Community Learning & Development Team Leader): spoke about his role working with communities to further community priorities, and to increase community capacity, and he asked how the nearby Energy Park might provide a chance for training and employment for local residents. **[see link]**
- **Szabolcs Kerek** (Housing Officer) Home Energy Conservation Act – spoke about Fife Council's home insulation schemes/ solar packages and Council Tax reduction schemes in relation to fuel poverty. **[see link]**

BUCKHAVEN PRESENTATION

Before asking people to propose topics for the Open Space discussions, the local environmental action group, CLEAR, were asked to present their work and their context; partly so that the subsequent discussions could be informed not just by Fife community projects which have succeeded in securing funding, but by one which has not had the resources and support to secure funding, and which is characterised by economic and social disadvantage and less civic engagement.

Allen Armstrong: Presentation on Buckhaven and CLEAR [see link]

Buckhaven, like other communities in Levenmouth, has suffered through the loss of its economic infrastructure and as a result has (according to all SIMD indicators) developed significant pockets of disadvantage and deprivation.

Like most of the Levenmouth area, Buckhaven is deprived (according to all SIMD indicators), neglected and disempowered. The fishing fleet, the coal industry, the offshore oil construction are all gone. The popular seaside resort, the rail link, the college are all gone. Although Levenmouth has 10% of Fife's population, organisations like the Energy Savings Trust don't hold meetings here, even national commercial chains have few branches in Levenmouth. There is no community council in Buckhaven, Methil or Methilhill, reflecting people's feelings of apathy and disengagement. 'Municipalism' - the feeling that the council should do everything - is pervasive.

CLEAR has been moderately successful in planting and small landscaping to improve the appearance.. but it is hard to get the community engaged and so CLEAR has had to look beyond for volunteer manpower, for example involving University of St Andrews students and Falkland Air Cadets in planting trees. CLEAR has a longer term aim of becoming a Transition Town, of using the many large gardens and adjoining open space to grow food, of developing renewable energy – how can Fife Council help with this and in community engagement in a town in which the flagship Fife Energy Park is located? Allen ended by quoting Tony, a member of CLEAR, who had made a plea for Buckhaven getting support from others to make a Transition initiative succeed there when he said: "If Transition can be made to happen in Buckhaven, then it can happen anywhere".

OPEN SPACE SMALL GROUP ENERGY DISCUSSIONS:

These discussion groups focused on topics decided by participants. Key points were:

1. Communication

- (i) **Portal** needed for community groups to engage with each other
- (ii) **Need key contacts in Council** for communities to engage with, and to let community groups know who else to contact in departments
- (iii) Make use of **Energy Saving Scotland** 0800512012 for advice

2. Local Authority Planning

- (i) **Need Interface:** clear guidelines and an interface between planners and community groups (e.g. guidance for community renewable projects, conservation areas)
- (ii) **Innovative ecological planning criteria:** Can energy efficiency be a criteria for planning permission (e.g. must be 100% from renewables or very low CO2 standard for new build; ensure building standards are actually implemented, planning used to promote ecological innovation [e.g. mixing home and work places to eliminate commuting; e.g. using innovative building materials, etc])
- (iii) **Research:** Carry out specific studies to inform planning system (e.g. mapping renewable potentials)

3. Equity

- (i) **Changing the CCF:** Growing schism between the 'Well off' and 'Those without' since the current CCF, although usefully experimental, is unfair, and needs stronger guidelines
- (ii) **Community Rolling Fund:** Pioneering communities show the way, but there needs to be a mechanism to 'pay back' public funds by placing them in a 'community rolling fund' [this was proposed by NHTT's Neil Stoddard in response to CLEAR's objection that the 'leafier' parts of Fife have the resources to secure CCF funding to become even more resourced in the face of the looming energy crisis]. Communities who are supported to develop renewables could put a proportion of the funds generated into a Fife-wide community pot which other communities could draw on to create their renewable projects which could put a proportion into the growing fund, etc.
- (iii) **Twinning:** Pioneering areas could help build a Fife 'knowledge bank' for other communities; and provide a mentoring scheme twinning with those areas that have been being left behind

4. How to engage individuals

- (i) **Use lure of saving money** to engage people
- (ii) **Starting with local council** - Envirowemyss – starting point was the community council, but is now independent, first project involves transport and schools
- (iii) **Non-specific lure** (i.e. broader than just environmental) e.g. 'Making St Andrews a Better Place' drew in 160 people, including 40 who just turned up on the day

5. Gender

- (i) **Extra money** in promoting Gender issue (e.g. in EU funding)
- (ii) **Women's key position:** tend to be in charge of household budgets so need to be brought into debate, and can teach appropriate skills

- (iii) **Marginalised:** Only 20% of tech staff females, and community groups usually male led. Diversity is a positive! [It was noted that in some environmental groups the vast majority are women, in others they are men, and in others there is a balance].

6. Political leadership – engaging with your councillors

- (i) **Capacity building with councillors** who may be new to climate change and sustainability, need to link immediate needs with CC/SDS agendas. Pick up phone to them, go to surgeries, engage as group member. Small groups can have big impact, including with councillors
- (ii) **Need cross-party support:** to build CC/SD into council priorities
- (iii) **What do councils want from communities?** Service delivery/efficiency agendas. Well organised communities can allow councils to focus on areas that are less well organised.

7. Finding trustworthy contractors: The problem being that Govt agencies are not allowed to make specific contractor recommendations but that is what householders need to get trustworthy contractors:

- (i) Could Fife Council provide a forum for publicising info and help?

CONCLUSION:

As is clear from the open space discussion, as well as some very clear suggestions across a range of topics, some very clear strategies and definite next steps emerged in relation to how those communities who have pushed ahead with community building through carbon reduction initiatives (often involving CCF funding, e.g. North Howe Transition Toun) can work with those (such as CLEAR In Buckhaven) who feel left behind by that agenda and who want the help of those who have forged ahead in order to catch up.

This process began with a follow up meeting in Buckhaven on April 1st between this Action Research team, North Howe Transition Toun, Greener Kirkcaldy and CLEAR.