SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES	Agenda Item No. 5
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Report of the Executive Director of Operations

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POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This report is being presented to provide a snapshot of some activities currently being undertaken across the country, by local groups, aiming to reduce their environmental impact. The aim of this report is to consider how such activities could be delivered locally by Peterborough's rural communities

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 To take note of the information contained within this report, how elements contained within it can be applied or adapted within the context of Peterborough's rural communities.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

3.1 This aspect of work directly links to our Environment Capital aspirations and A-list programmes within the Single Delivery Plan including:

- Helping people and organisations to live more healthy and sustainable lives and reducing energy consumption;
- Using our resources more efficiently, effectively and innovatively;

In addition, this work also relates to the previous national indicator 186 – per capita CO_2 emissions for Peterborough. Whilst this indicator no longer exists in its original format the data will still continue to be collated by AEA Technology Group on behalf of the Department for Energy and Climate Change. This provides an indication of our achievements in carbon reduction which currently equates to 7.8 tonnes CO_2 per capita.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Across the UK there are countless examples of community led action which has seen significant progress in relation to achieving the UK's low carbon aspirations. In November 2010, Greg Barker, Minister of State for Climate Change, said "Community energy is a perfect expression of the transformative power of the Big Society. With the right combination of incentives and freedoms, community groups, businesses and organisation can get together to build a cleaner, greener future. They can generate their own heat and electricity, and their own profits, and as a by-product, help the UK to save energy and help to cut carbon emissions."

Rural villages have proven to be particularly successful in implementing environmental initiatives, particularly where clear geographical boundaries foster community spirit. One such example is Ashton Hayes village in Cheshire. In 2006 they set out their ambition to become a carbon neutral village. Whilst they have not reached their goal, they are well on their way. Successes to date include:

- low carbon classrooms and renewable energy sources at the local primary school;
- community electric vehicle operating on a loan basis;
- calculating their community carbon footprint for the last five years;
- opening a new recreation field, play area and a £250,000 low carbon sports pavilion; and
- completing a feasibility survey for the village to explore the possibilities for generation of energy within the village.

Critical to this success has been the overwhelming level of community engagement, resulting in real buy-in to the scheme. This has not only fostered fantastic community spirit but also has helped the village attract some serious investment from grant and private sector sources. Ashton Hayes has also produced a toolkit to help other villages striving for the same ambition.

A second project is in Reepham, Norfolk where residents have collaborated to set up energy reduction and renewable energy projects across the town. In the process they have reduced their CO_2 emissions by 88 tonnes and created a network of community champions who lead projects and gather more support from residents. The Reepham Green Team is a social group that meets bi-monthly, to chat informally, swap tips and develop plans for putting projects into motion. When the Green Team came together their first task was to give the community a target to focus on. To achieve this a carbon audit was carried out to pinpoint how much energy the town was using and where. The results showed that Reepham's carbon emissions were 48% above the national average and highlighted three main reasons for this; the town has a relatively old housing stock which was badly insulated, high car use due to poor public transport and its rural location, and many homes reliant on oil for heating. The Green Team set about tackling these problem areas and:

- insulated over 200 houses;
- set up a car share club to cut down on car use; and
- started the UK's first trial of waste vegetable oil as fuel for heating homes.

Using their community network, Reepham have recently rolled out projects across 18 community groups, installing renewable energy in schools, community halls, a housing trust and the local train station.

A third project is the national Transitional Towns scheme. This focuses on either towns or streets, using a bottom up approach to community development. Transitional streets use a street by street approach where neighbours are encouraged to work together to tackle energy consumption within each others houses. Transitional Towns are a community project that focuses on specific issues or themes within a community. Local examples that have active transitional groups include Stamford and Oundle. Each group varies in achievements and action but all have the same aim of delivering meaningful changes at a local level. Schemes include village surveying, renewable energy, and community engagement and training.

A slightly different angle, not focussing on energy, is the trend in the UK for villages to go plastic bag free; Modbury in Devon was the first town in Europe to dump plastic bags. All shopkeepers in the village signed up to this initiative including small independent traders as well as the towns Co-op. This store alone could use 500 to 1000 plastic bags in a day, but these days are gone and this principle is now capturing the imagination of many other communities across the UK who are starting to follow suit.

Finally, an example of locally led action within Peterborough is the Glinton and Peakirk Green Group. This is made up of residents who live in both villages who share an environmental interest. The group launched their campaign in 2008 with an environmental fair at the local secondary school. They arranged speakers to discuss the potential of what the communities could achieve and exhibited a range of products, for example insulation, solar PV etc. The two villages will also complete a final round of SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure which rates a homes energy efficiency) surveys during this autumn which will see nearly all the housing stock within the villages with an energy rating. This alone is quite unique and provides a new insight into where local action could be targeted. They have also received training and used the climate

change teams hand held thermal imagery camera over the winter of 2010. In doing so they have taken some interesting images of local housing in order to encourage energy efficiency upgrades and retro fitting. Below is an example of a house of a resident who opted to have cavity wall insulation following sight of the thermal image of his house demonstrating the amount of heat lost through the walls.

| Before insulation | After cavity wall insulation |
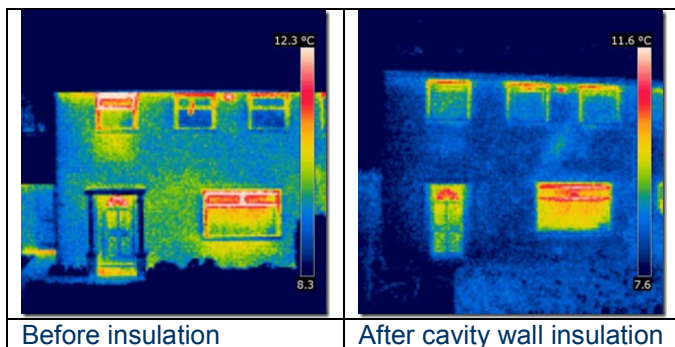
During winter 2011/12, the group will continue to use the thermal camera with the aim of mapping heat loss values. They will also work with the climate change team to record heat loss from similar house types to produce literature for wider distribution.

An example of local action, without a dedicated community group, is the Community Energy Challenges. These award winning challenges have been running in Peterborough for nearly two years and have successfully run in communities such as Werrington, Glinton and Peakirk. The challenges see up to 70 residents pit themselves against each other in a bid to reduce energy use with prizes awarded for those who saved the most energy. To date the challenges have engaged over 300 households.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Whilst this report provides evidence of successful schemes across the country there are several implications to consider which effect success. These include:

1. In some cases once initatives are undertaken, difficulty in collecting statistics to provide evidence of achievement is often experienced. For example, energy companies are unable to provide energy consumption on a geographic basis to enable actual analysis of energy reductions.
2. Whole community engagement can be difficult to foster and requires significant effort and resource.
3. Financial backing is difficult to achieve but has proven to be essential in making significant achievement. However, there are funding streams available for community initiatives but these require some degree of expertise alongside actual time to complete. This can be restrictive for small rural communities and unsuccessful applications can often lead to community groups becoming disheartened and losing key support amongst peers.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no implications to this report at this stage.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 No consultation has taken place at this stage as this report is for information purposes only.

8. NEXT STEPS

8.1 To discuss this report and agree follow up actions. For example, further research, seeking external funding or inviting a representative from a locally led group to present to a future meeting of this Commission.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

9.1   The following documents provide more information for consideration:
        http://www.goingcarbonneutral.co.uk - Ashton Hayes dedicated website
        http://www.peterborough.gov.uk/climatechange   –   Click   on   I   am   a   resident
        http://www.transitiontogether.org.uk - Encouraging action in groups of around 5-10 households
        http://www.stamfordtransitiontown.org.uk - Stamford transition town website
        http://www.oundletransition.org.uk - Oundle town transition town website
        http://www.energyshare.com/groups/full-case-studies/reepham-green-team - Reepham

10.   APPENDICES

10.1   None.