

Case Study 9: Beacon Community Regeneration Project



This case study forms part of **Community Action for Energy**, a major programme designed to promote and facilitate local community-based energy projects. The programme is an initiative for the Environment, Education & Community group of the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes.

Beacon Community Regeneration Project

Introduction

This case study provides an overview of the energy-related elements of a major community-wide regeneration project. Beacon Housing Estate in Falmouth, once a severely disadvantaged area of Cornwall, has been transformed through a programme of housing improvements.



When?

It was launched in the spring of 1995 and is ongoing.

Who's involved?

The Beacon Community Regeneration Partnership comprises tenants, residents and representatives of agencies who play a key role in the area. The Regeneration Partnership committee includes four representatives from the Penwerris Tenants and Residents Association, four representatives from the Old Hill Community Association and one representative each from the Beacon Community Junior School, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary (Falmouth Police Station), Falmouth Youth Club, Primary Care Trust health visitors and Carrick District Council. Community Energy Plus (Cornwall's Energy Efficiency Advice Centre) have helped advise on the project and give energy advice to householders.

How is it funded?

The energy efficiency improvements made under the scheme were initially funded by £1.2 million of government capital funding, under Single Regeneration Budget 1. Carrick District Council later topped up this figure by a further £1 million.

What are the targets and aims?

Beacon Community Regeneration Project is for the benefit of all the residents of the Beacon Estate. As far as the energy-related aspects of the project are concerned, the aims are:

- to implement energy efficiency improvements in all 1008 of the estate's houses
- to achieve an average SAP energy rating of 65 across the estate
- to alleviate fuel poverty and social exclusion
- to improve the comfort and health of residents
- to raise community spirit by improving the appearance of the neighbourhood.

SAP Standard Assessment Procedure. The SAP rating provides a simple indicator of the efficiency of energy use for space and water heating in new and existing dwellings. SAP ratings are expressed on a scale of 1 (poor) to 100 (excellent).

“Our vision is to continue improving the living standards of all the tenants and residents that we represent.”

Beacon Community Regeneration Partnership committee

Beacon Community Regeneration Project

How was it implemented?

Every home on the estate was surveyed by a professional company and given a SAP energy rating. The committee, in consultation with tenants and with advice from Carrick District Council and Community Energy Plus, then decided on which energy efficiency measures were most appropriate. Loft insulation, external or cavity wall insulation and central heating were chosen as the measures most likely to quickly and effectively cut energy wastage on the estate. Moreover, it was known that other measures such as double glazing and draught proofing were already available through other schemes.

Carrick District Council put the contract for the installation work out to tender. With the committee's approval, they oversaw the appointment and management of contractors.

Residents remained in their properties while works were carried out. When having external cladding installed, they were given a choice of which surface finish and colour they preferred. After measures were installed, each householder was visited by Community Energy Plus and given advice about how to use their heating systems and about all other aspects of saving energy at home. The energy saving message was also regularly reiterated by a two-monthly newsletter and regular leafleting. Residents could also get information at the drop-in Beacon Resource Community Centre. Once work on each property was completed, the SAP energy rating was reassessed.

Achievements

- energy efficiency improvements have been made to 900 homes
- central heating and insulation measures have been installed in 300 properties
- in the first year, a total of £186,000 was saved on fuel bills
- SAP energy ratings in over 50% of properties are now in the region of 60 (from an original average of around 30)
- new cladding in bright colours has transformed the previously bleak environment.

The Regeneration Partnership believes a range of other changes can also be attributed to the housing improvements:

- there have been health improvements among residents, including a 50% drop in the numbers suffering from asthma, as recognised by the 1999 Nye Bevan Awards
- the local school reports a 100% improvement in the Standard Assessment Task (SAT) results of boys
- the crime rate has dropped dramatically, including a reduction in domestic violence incidents and the number of children on the Children at Risk Register, and vandalism is at an all-time low
- there is increased employment
- more people are wanting to move to the estate
- there is a remarkable upswing in community spirit.

Key success factors

- the project has a full-time project manager
- development has been from the bottom up, involving the residents at every stage
- good communication is vital: the project has never assumed that it knows what people want and there has been constant consultation (for example via door-to-door surveys and public meetings)
- the committee has been effective by always holding open, honest debates and keeping in mind their one goal: the betterment of the community
- although it is easier for outside agencies to do things for the community, the project has taught the community how to do things for itself.

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Lessons learnt

- housing improvement policy needs to be explained clearly to residents – not everyone has had their works done yet but, by ensuring they are kept informed about where they are on the list, residents have been willing to wait patiently for their turn
- the funding, although substantial, was insufficient to improve all properties on the estate. As a result, progress recently has been slower as funding sources are sought to continue the programme for all the homes
- agencies that are involved need to communicate effectively between each other, as well as with the community, and team up to work together when necessary
- every resident or tenant has a right to be involved at a level they are happy with
- let partner organisations provide specific support based on their expertise. For example, Carrick District Council had an established infrastructure and expertise to handle the management of contractors
- there was a lack of local manpower to install the measures as quickly as required
- the professional SAP energy surveys were a large expense (£20,000). SAP ratings were also thought to vary to an unaccountable extent and therefore were not regarded as wholly reliable
- visible improvements (such as the brightly-coloured external cladding) help people feel things are changing for the better and that the project is worthwhile.

Next steps

The housing improvements are ongoing and investment is being sought for further improvements, including possible solar installations. Beacon Community Regeneration Partnership is also seeking charitable status.

Further information

For further information about this project contact:

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