

Beacon case study – sustainable energy

Woking Borough Council

Overview of Authority

Woking Borough Council is located in the South East of England, covers a geographical area of approximately 65 km² and services a population of 89,836.

Our approach to local sustainable energy systems is to supply customers on private wire combined heat and power (CHP) and/or renewable energy networks, as well as implementing energy and environmental services in both the public and private sectors. The key to the Council's success is the combination of technical innovation (such as CHP, absorption cooling, private wire systems etc.); partnership with the private sector; financial/commercial innovation; and, the use of a local electricity balancing and trading system.

We have partly overcome the regulatory barriers to sustainable energy, namely the high costs and levies incurred on electricity bills under the New Electricity Trading Arrangements, by taking advantage of the Electricity (Class Exemptions from the Requirement for a Licence) Order 2001. However, the exempt licensing regime limits exempt supply capacity to domestic customers and limits exports over public wires. We continue to make representations to the Government to remove these barriers.

Although Woking had been successful in implementing small scale local community energy systems, to fully capitalise on its sustainable energy innovation, it needed the finance and expertise of the private sector to finance and implement large scale projects. The Council formed Thamesway Limited and Thamesway Energy Limited in 1999 which has enabled the Council to increase its distributed generation capacity.

What has been achieved?

An overview of the initiatives that they have developed and how they were developed within the authority

- The environment is the second priority only to affordable housing
- The Council formed two special purpose vehicles (companies) in 1999 to further the energy and environmental objectives – Thamesway Ltd and Thamesway Energy Ltd.
- Corporate Energy Efficiency Strategy in 1990/91 to achieve 40% reduction in energy consumption in 10 years – by March 2004 WBC had already achieved 48.6%.

- WBC is well on track to meet the 2006 30% HECA target – by March 2004, 26% had been achieved.
- By March 2004 the Council had seen a reduction in CO2 emissions of 77% under its own property and a saving of 91,270 tonnes per annum under HECA.
- In 2001, WBC was awarded the Queen's Award for Enterprise – the only local authority to have been granted this award.
- Approximately 1200 Council owned properties benefit from low heating and power charges and 3,700 residents have been provided with free or subsidised insulation.
- Climate Change Strategy (CCS) adopted by the Council in December 2002 with three overarching themes: reduction of CO2 equivalent emissions; adaptation to climate change; and promotion of sustainable development.
- CCS seeks to achieve the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's targets of 60% reduction in CO2 equivalent emissions by 2050 and 80% by 2100.
- Climate Neutral Practice Note which seeks to promote voluntary cooperation between parties involved in the local development process to achieve 80% reduction in CO2 emissions and mitigation against climate change.
- Since the inception of the CCS, a reduction of 17.23% in CO2 equivalent emissions Borough wide has been achieved (March 2004).
- The Borough has a sustainable energy 200kWe fuel cell CHP
- The Borough has more than 9% of the total UK installed capacity of PV and a private wire distributed generation system, providing electricity, district heating and cooling directly to local customers.

Service Delivery Tips

Do

- Develop clear outcomes with appropriate actions and timescales– in Woking's case this was done through its Climate Change Strategy. Each action has a timescale of either 1-3 years, 3-5 years or 5-10 years and progress is monitored through reports and quarterly Climate Change Working Group meetings which are attended by Members and officers.
- In developing strategies, consult partners and stakeholders in order to cover all service areas.

- Work with commercial and non-commercial partners to meet environmental goals. Many of Woking's achievements have only been possible via inter-agency working.
- Community engagement and consultation is vital. Consult the public and listen to their views. In Woking's case this has often been done through independent consultants.
- Communicate with the public through newsletters and local media. For instance with the launch of Woking's Climate Change Strategy, a four page newsletter was distributed to residents through the local Woking Magazine informing them what the Strategy seeks to achieve.
- Promote continuous monitoring of progress. Progress monitoring is important to ensure that actions can be delivered as outlined.
- Maximise use of technology and technological expertise. The pooling together of expertise both in-house and from external advisors maximises the efficiency and deliverability of projects.
- Recognise the importance of political support. Woking's achievements in sustainable local energy owe much to the political leadership of the Council in championing the issues of energy efficiency and sustainability. The active participation of the Council's political leaders in promoting sustainability has been one of the main contributory factors in achieving main-streaming of sustainability throughout the Council's business activities.
- Address environmental issues corporately – the components of which are political ownership, technical skills and a sound managerial approach.
- Recognise that local sustainable energy can be small or large scale. The Woking experience shows that installations can be small or large scale for instance the condensing boiler scheme in association with The Energy Care Network (TECN) is an example of a small scale initiative bringing sustainable energy to local people
- Share knowledge with other local authorities, private individuals, businesses and community groups; and learn from others' experience.

Don't

- Go it alone. The benefit of experience and knowledge from partners should not be underestimated in implementing sustainable energy projects and strategies.
- Miss opportunities to secure external funding.
- Underestimate the need for public consultation. It is essential to inform the public about proposed projects and strategies and provide information to set projects in the context of wider corporate objectives.

- Be scared to be innovative.
- Ignore good practice from elsewhere. This links to partnership working and gaining the benefit of experience and knowledge from partners or organisations that have implemented similar projects or strategies.

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