

**Consultation on the Government's Heat and Energy Saving Strategy:
Response from Bollington Carbon Revolution, a voluntary low carbon community
reduction group**

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Q1. Do you agree with the level of ambition and the indicative pathway set out in this chapter? If not, why, and what alternative would you suggest?

Targets

Although the measures proposed in Chapter 1 of the consultation document are welcome, in our opinion the targets do not go far enough. The existing housing stock contributes significantly to total UK carbon emissions, and it should be given much greater emphasis. We would like to make the following observations and recommendations in relation to the targets proposed in the consultation document:

- All lofts and cavity walls will be insulated where practical by 2015.
 - Loft and cavity walls are quick wins, as the measures are easy to install and the pay back period is just a few years. On this basis, what is the justification for this needing to take 6 years to achieve?
 - The target states "where practical", however there is no clarification as to what the definition of practical is in this respect. Having an ambiguous statement such as "practical" in a target leaves room to deviate away from the target.
- All homes to have received by 2030 a 'whole house' package including all cost-effective energy saving measures, plus renewable heat and electricity measures as appropriate
 - Does the "whole house package" include both the audit and installation of measures identified by the audit. This target is alluding to it taking 21 years for every home to achieve this. If we are to act quickly to address the existing housing stock this period is too long. All homes should have an audit within the next few years so all residents can understand immediately the changes they need to make and how much it will cost to make these changes, so they can start to begin the programme of works. This will also be a significant boost to the construction industry and therefore the economy as homeowners start to seek the services of contractors installing low carbon measures such as boilers, insulation, glazing and renewable technology.
- By 2020 household emissions are a third lower than they are today
 - Household emissions can be reduced by a third through a combination of no-cost behavioural management changes, and through the installation of loft and cavity wall insulation. A 2020 target to achieve such reductions is not stringent enough given that these changes are low hanging fruit and therefore should be implemented a lot sooner. More costly measures such as double glazing and boiler replacement will bring further and significant reductions, and could be easily accessed through financial support mechanisms. With the right financial support measures these changes could also happen well before 2020. Finally there are more intrusive measures such as solid wall insulation and floor insulation which should be promoted when homes are renovated/ redecorated.

These changes may take longer but is it unfeasible for all these changes to happen within the next 20 years?

Availability of communication

We agree with the identification that “comprehensive information and advice to be made available to help people make changes to save energy and save money – including widespread availability of home energy advice by accredited advisers”. Our experience within Bollington has shown that there is a great deal of confusion as to what to do to make homes low carbon homes, yet when this information is provided to engaged people, action is taken. We have some positive experiences in how to communicate effectively such as:-

- Running a 1 day eco-refurbishment course which was attended by 48 delegates who committed to making changes equivalent to 77 tonnes of carbon per year as a direct result of the course.
- Home eco-audits
- Facilitated learning groups/ support groups.
- Advice through word of mouth based on own experiences

Financial support

We agree with the need to develop new ways of financial support. Retrofitting a home to become a low carbon home takes significant investment, and more people will be willing to make these changes if finances were made available. However, improved financial support is not the only issue we need to address. Taking the CERT scheme as an example, financial support is already available for relatively low cost high return measures such as loft and cavity wall insulation, however this is not fully utilised by the public due to a combination of lack of awareness of the scheme or its benefits, or lack of time to arrange for the work to be undertaken. More emphasis needs to be placed on how to change peoples attitudes and bring about the required behavioural change and willingness to make their homes low carbon homes.

Delivery model

We agree that a new delivery model should be considered to allow a more coordinated approach to rolling out improvements to homes and communities, house-by-house and street-by-street. We think it is very important however that any new delivery model takes into consideration the low carbon community movement in the voluntary sector. This is an excellent, proven resource, which should be recognised, supported and invested in, and its potential for helping in delivering change should not be underestimated.

Inclusively

We agree with the statement that “fairness is both right in itself and the only way to achieve the changes we need”. Elderly people and households on low incomes should certainly receive support, however no-one should be excluded from receiving support. Hard working middle class family's do not always have a high disposable income, and are have very little time to research into suppliers, obtain quotes, and be at home for the work to be undertaken. These groups of people also need support, both in terms of advice, and also financial support. Failure to recognise this will alienate this group of people who will be reluctant to make an investment to change if they see others getting support where they aren't.

Q2. Do you agree with the Government's policy approach set out in paragraphs 1.31 onwards to achieving our ambitions on heat and energy saving?

We agree whole heartedly with the statement that increasing awareness of the support on offer is key.

We also consider the Whole House approach is essential. However, we have the following concerns:-

- Once a home audit has been undertaken, how will you ensure that the improvements have been undertaken? Undergoing the audit is only the first step, and home owners will need support to undertake all of the recommendations over a number of years. Without this support you run the risk of homeowners having an audit and then not acting on the recommendations.
- Are any incentives being considered for homeowners who complete all of the recommendations in the home audit?

We consider the installation of SMART meters as a positive step, however is there evidence that demonstrates people use these devices to change behaviour, and if so what training/ support will they need to undergo in order to do so?

We agree that people achieve more by working together. We have proved that through the roll out of the Global Action Plan Ecoteam programme where we have over 30 households in 2009 undertaking a 5 month behavioural change programme working in groups of 4-8 households, measuring and reducing their waste generation, water and energy consumption, and improving their shopping and travel habits and reducing their use of chemicals. The pilot programme in 2008 on four households saw average home energy reductions of 42% in electricity and 9% in gas.

We support the principle of the Community Energy Saving Programme, however we question:-

- Why it will only be targeting low income areas? In order to understand how to deliver change across the whole of the UK, we think all types of communities should be included in the pilot, from both ends of the income scale.
- Why is the programme only focusing on 100 communities? Is this a pilot which will then be rolled out to all communities? If so, what are the medium and long terms targets?

Q3: How can the Government encourage people and communities to change behaviour to save energy? What is the appropriate balance between changing attitudes, and providing advice and information?

Home Energy Advice Service

Chapter 2 of the consultation paper makes reference to training up the existing EPC Assessors to provide a more comprehensive Home Energy Advice service, providing tailored in-home advice.

Providing behavioural change advice requires a subtly different skill set compared with providing advice on home infrastructural areas such as insulation measures, or replacement boiler, windows, doors or renewables installation. Residents may not respond positively to being told to turn their heating down, or running their washing machine on a lower temperature, as these are very personal choices. In addition, undergoing a home audit will not in itself

change behaviour, and homeowners will need ongoing support to help them make the necessary changes both to their home and behaviour. This should be taken into consideration when designing the training package for existing home energy assessors.

Advice line

The Energy Savings Trust advice line is a useful resource, however people are much less likely to seek advice over the phone, than seek face to face advice. We think a network of Energy Advice Centres should be created, in exemplar retrofitted buildings which can serve as demonstration projects. Having a physical advice centre to go to will make the agenda much more viable, and create a hub for the community around this area. Workshops and training sessions could be held at the centres, and they could be staffed, holding a database of local examples of low carbon homes, and local suppliers.

Using the Third Sector to help deliver cultural change

In Chapter 2 the paper makes reference to the Government not being able to achieve such a significant cultural change alone, and that you will need to engage with a range of bodies, creating a coalition that can reach out to the whole population through various channels, for example, schools, churches, and other local community groups.

We strongly advise that you look to the low carbon community movement which has been growing over recent years, as this voluntary sector has excellent links with the community and can communicate messages effectively. This resource should be supported through the appointment of paid local co-ordinators, guidance, and funding so they can deliver messages more effectively.

We also recommend using structured behavioural change programmes to deliver change, such as the Global Action Plan Ecoteam programme, or the Carbon Reduction Action Group model. Both of these models are proven to change behaviour and an excellent way to harness enthusiasm.

Q4: How can home energy audits be made most useful, and do you agree that the Government should use Domestic Energy Assessors, who have been suitably trained, to deliver them as widely as possible?

Home energy audits can be made more useful by:-

- Providing a list of local suppliers to undertake the work
- Providing details of grants available
- Providing advice on behavioural change aspects
- Providing a number of follow up audits to measure the changes which have been made and provide further advice/ support
- Signposting the home owner to local support networks, such as Carbon Reduction Action Groups, Ecoteams and Low Carbon Community Groups.

We agree in part with the statement what the Government should use Domestic Energy Assessors who have been suitably training. However, we believe from our experience providing behavioural change advice requires a subtly different skill set compared with providing advice

on home infrastructural areas such as insulation measures, or replacement boiler, windows, doors or renewables installation. Residents may now respond positively to being told to turn their heating down, or running their washing machine on a lower temperature. In addition, undergoing a home audit will not in itself change behaviour, and homeowners will need ongoing support to help them make the necessary changes both to their home and behaviour.

Home owners need to be set on an improvement programme following the initial audit, where targets are set, support is provided and performance is measured. If this is not in place there is a significant risk that the audit recommendations will not be implemented.

The consultation paper makes reference in paragraph 2.31 that community engagement is a vital part of the Governments strategy. We advocate this view point. Paragraph 2.34 goes on to state that to facilitate community engagement schemes, Domestic Energy Advisors will receive training so they can advise groups and communities, and specific training is references so they will be able to provide accessible, local advice that can help to bring communities together and save energy to reduce their CO₂ emissions.

Although this is a good idea in principle, the skill sets of existing EPC Assessors compared with the skill sets required to harness community engagement in a low carbon reduction programme should be reviewed carefully. An EPC Assessor will have technical skills in how to assess the current energy performance of a home and make recommendations to improve this performance. However, taking this to a community level will involve a different set of skills which should be considered carefully. From our experience engaging at a community level involves the following skills:-

- Identification of effective community channels
- Ability to engage with a wide range of stakeholders who can help champion the cause
- Ability to communicate with a whole range of people with different levels of understanding, and ability to deliver change for themselves
- Ability to take a strategic view of a community and target quick win areas, as well as harder to reach areas
- Ability to identify a range of support mechanisms which will appeal to various groups and deliver these.

Any existing EPC Assessors competencies will need to be assessed and then they should embark on a training programme to develop the required competencies to deliver behavioural change within a whole community.

Consideration should also be given to the existing voluntary low carbon community groups, and how they may respond to a trained, paid individual coming into their community. This should be managed carefully, and through the Low Carbon Community group themselves, in order to get buy in and the most effective result.

Q5: Should the Government work with industry to develop accreditation standards for advice about, and installation of, energy efficiency technologies? What would be the best model for such a scheme, and why?

We believe that such accreditation standards are key. The low carbon market is an emerging field, and credibility is essential if home owners are going to buy in to it. Miss-trust in this field will prevent the change that is needed.

The simplest model from the home owners perspective is a labelling scheme on products and services, administered from a reputable central body such as the Energy Savings Trust. Labelling is very obvious to the homeowner and enables them to make the right decisions quickly.

Q9: What action, if any, should the Government take to enable finance to be arranged for the higher cost energy efficiency and low carbon measures? Are there other options the Government should consider? Please provide evidence to support your response

We agree in principle that loans should be offered to home owners to enable them to fund high cost measures and pay back the loan with the savings made over a period of time. However we do not agree that householders should be encouraged to take out loans from finance organisation where there will be an interest rate charge applied, even if the loan is subsidised.

Taking this example provided in paragraph 3.20, a £5800 loan stretched out over 25 years with a repayment of £430 per year would mean the home owner would pay a total back of £10,705, almost double the amount which was borrowed.

Given the huge potential the existing housing stock has to offer in respect to reducing carbon emissions, we propose that the government invests heavily in this, by providing 5 year interest free loans of £5000 to each home who undergoes a "whole house audit". Conditions should be attached that it must be spent on low carbon retrofit measures and that this should be monitored. Payments should be taken from the payroll, in a set up similar to the Student Loans scheme. This scheme is similar to the scheme undertaken in Canada and our insight within our own community confirms to us that this is the best approach to deliver the required change. Homeowners should not be expected to take out finance with an interest rate charged, as this does not offer them best value for money.

Q17: Do you have views on the merits of moving to a different approach for delivering energy efficiency to households? Do you have other suggestions of alternative delivery models which might be effective in achieving our objective?

Our recommendation would be to utilise the voluntary low carbon community groups to deliver the change as a community wide approach, as they have links with the whole community, and are able to draw on volunteers to support the roll out of support. The following support should be provided:-

- A demonstration retrofitted building which they can use as a hub for their activities, referred to as a low carbon advice centre.
- Structured training to provide the volunteers with the skills they need to deliver their particular area of interest. For example to roll out the EcoTeam programme EcoTeam leaders will need to be trained, or to lead a Carbon Reduction Action Group, training may be needed, both in terms of technical training, and also facilitation skills.
- A paid co-ordinator or co-ordinators to co-ordinate the volunteer group activities and the running of the low carbon advice centre.
- Funding to enable the groups to develop communication material, run behavioural change programmes or events, and purchase learning materials such as low energy devices and books.
- Consultancy support for community low carbon schemes such as District CHP schemes, hydropower or anaerobic digestion.

Low carbon community groups should be recognised as official sources of distributing information to communities. Structured messages could come from a central co-ordinating body at a national level and these could then be communicated through the Low Carbon Community Groups.

Q18: Would you support a voluntary code of practice on energy performance for landlords and/or builders? How high do you think uptake would be, and would it achieve much additional action? Please support your response with evidence.

Voluntary Codes of Practice have limited success, and they often precede legislation which is enforced when the VCPs prove to be ineffective. As rapid change is required we would ask for legislation, rather than a Voluntary Code of Practice.