

## CARBON MAKEOVER: HOUSING ESTATE EDITION

### Go Carbon Neutral, London and Carbon Makeover, Bristol



Cranberry Lane residents launching Go Carbon Neutral at their east London estate (Source: Go Carbon Neutral)

*The push for personal environmental action has traditionally belonged to the domain of the suburban and rural, middle-class homeowner. Think of all the carbon calculators and suggestions for action; with detached homes to heat, cars to drive, and multiple weekend holidays via flying, it's no wonder that much of the advice and support for 'going green' was aimed at them. But it is increasingly obvious that it is up to all of us to take some action in order to stop the damage we're already doing to the planet. This means reaching out to the people who haven't traditionally been the target of these eco-campaigns.*

But whilst the living rooms of the chattering classes can be swayed by grand gestures of global significance, the same approach doesn't necessarily work for those living in housing estates. That's where Michael Norton thinks he knows different.

When Michael was approached to submit a grants proposal by the Wates Foundation, he knew what kind of project he wanted to do. Instead of having a project that lectured and preached to the working class, he wanted to bring the people themselves into the debate. "I didn't want a project that came off as pontificating to people," says Michael. "The question was, how to engage them?"

The answer is simple: let them decide what to do, rather than telling them what to do. After winning funds to the tune of £100,000 for 2 years, Michael challenged 2 separate housing estates, one in Bristol and the other in Newham, London, to develop their own plan to attack climate change.

Go Carbon Neutral and Carbon Makeover are groundbreaking new projects which will show how, regardless of income or social status, everyone can contribute to the climate change agenda – and furthermore, that in reducing their carbon footprint, people can also reduce their financial strain, improve their physical environment and the sense of belonging to the community. This means recognising that residents of low income urban areas may have patterns of energy consumption that differ widely from the SUV-driving, foreign holiday-going middle class.

Social housing makes up around 13% of England's housing stock and as a result, has the potential to make a huge contribution to the climate change agenda. Social landlords themselves have an environmental and social responsibility to let energy-efficient properties. But it is also a matter of persuading the people living in these homes to change their lifestyles and to sustain these good habits over time.

**“I think it is a really unique and original project and I want to get everyone on the estate involved to create a sense of community pride whilst tackling climate change.”**

*Fiona Booth, Go Carbon Neutral project coordinator in Cranberry Lane, Newham, east London*

The two housing estates who have agreed to take up the challenge both rank highly on the indices of deprivation: Knowle West in southeast Bristol, run by the Knowle West Media Centre; and Cranberry Lane in Newham, east London, run by East Thames Housing Association (East Potential) with the help of the West Ham & Plaistow New Deal for Communities.



*Knowle West resident Femi Ola (left) receives the first Carbon Makeover goodie bag from councillors Chris Jackson and Jeff Lovell, at the Carbon Makeover launch in November 2007. (Source: Carbon Makeover)*

Each estate will seek to engage 100 households and local schools in a sustained campaign to reduce carbon emissions over 12 months to December 2008. After the end of the year, what was learned from the project will be shared through a conference and a publication. It is possible that the local projects will continue after that, and that other projects could be brought into the programme over the course of the next two years.

It is unlikely that either of the two communities will actually achieve full carbon neutrality. Instead, the aim is to encourage people to become involved in reducing their own and the community's carbon footprint, to see how far they can get, and to assess the barriers to doing so.

Getting people to care is the hardest part of any campaign, and the key to success for Go Carbon Neutral and Carbon Makeover will be getting answers to questions like: What have they done and been able to sustain? What have they done and not been able to sustain? What don't they do whilst knowing that they ought to be doing it? What are the reasons for not doing it, and what do they think would enable them to overcome the barriers to changing their lifestyle?

**“A challenge will be making the links between the massive issue of climate change and the different themes of the projects. For example, what does changing a light bulb have to do with saving the world?”**

*Misty Tunks, Carbon Makeover project coordinator in Knowle West, Bristol*

Local people will drive the projects, supported by a full-time programme coordinator and a part-time local champion on each estate. Ten initiatives for each estate, each conceived and led by a resident and which aims to reduce carbon consumption in some way, will be run over a 12-month period. The project champion will persuade their peer group to buy into the idea. Approximately £1000 will be available for each of the 10 initiatives to cover project costs and personal development. The initiatives should be simple and fun, and will probably use a pledging and peer encouragement scheme to help bring fellow residents on-board.

What happens on one estate may be very different from what happens on the other. But it is hoped that there will be significant sharing of ideas – and even some measure of competition to achieve the greatest impact.

Misty Tunks, project coordinator for Knowle West, has lived on the estate for 5 years. “When I initially came across the project, I was very excited!” exclaims Misty. “It immediately stood out to me as an innovative and inspiring project that was going to take place on my doorstep – a participatory and working opportunity not to be missed!”

But she recognises the hurdles that will need to be cleared in order to be successful. “One challenge will be keeping people motivated and inspired. The commitment from households will be vital in order for us to facilitate this community involvement.”

Fiona Booth, project coordinator for Cranberry East, has a background in environmentalism and climate change community engagement – and she agrees with Misty. “One of the major challenges will be to get people to change their everyday behaviours, such as switching the TV off manually and not by the remote. It's these little things that make a difference; sometimes they are too small, people do not even think about doing it.”

But despite the challenges, Michael, Misty and Fiona are all optimistic about the project, which launched in October 2007 in Cranberry East, and in November 2007 in Knowle West.

“The opportunities are endless – ranging from installing renewable energy technologies on our residents homes to running environmental training courses – all increasing environmental awareness amongst the estate,” says Fiona. “I hope that the work will be recognised and we can win many awards and further funding for the project. I want people to learn from our work.”

## Facts and Information

- Knowle West, located in southeast Bristol, is an estate of 4,500 households which ranks in the worst 10% of the country for housing, health, educational attainment and employment. It also has high levels of teen pregnancy and is a hotspot for crime and drugs, with high youth offending rates.
- Cranberry Lane Estate, located in the London Borough of Newham, comprises 248 mixed tenure flats and houses. It is densely populated, but also geographically isolated and previously lacked community facilities. It ranks highly on indices of deprivation, with 34% claiming a key benefit, compared with 15% in England. Nearly 50% of adults have no or low qualifications.
- Saving energy is a great way of saving money too. Turning your thermostat down just 1 degree can save 10% on your heating bills. Low energy lightbulbs use a fifth of the electricity of incandescent bulbs and they last longer. In areas where you use them a lot, each bulb can save about £8 on your electricity bill each year.

## Further Resources

- For more information about the Go Carbon Neutral project, check out their website at [goco2neutral.blogspot.com](http://goco2neutral.blogspot.com).
- To find out more about energy projects in your community, contact the Community Action for Energy Team (CAfE) on 08701 261 444 or email [CAfE@est.org.uk](mailto:CAfE@est.org.uk) or visit their website at [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/cafe](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/cafe).
- To find out more about how to 'Save Your 20%', contact your local energy efficiency advice centre on 0800 512 012. Their trained advisors can provide information about the grants and discounts available for energy efficiency measures and renewable energy sources in the home.

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