

FROM LITTLE THINGS BIG THINGS GROW

Hilldrop Community Centre, Islington, London



Hilldrop Community Centre (Source: Hilldrop Community Centre)

When the Hilldrop Community Centre and the local Time Bank in Islington, north London, decided to go in on a project together, sparks flew. This dynamic partnership has helped the community centre to 'go green' and reduce its energy bills at the same time. Ann Mbachu, the Time Bank Broker who also works at the community centre, explains how.

Tell us a bit about the centre and the Time Bank.

The centre is situated between six local housing estates and it hosts a number of projects for the local community from an after-school club to employment and volunteering schemes. The Time Bank started in 2005 and now has 44 members who are part of a skills exchange. The exchange allows people to earn Time Bank hours for their activities, and then to 'spend' these when they may need assistance from other members.

Why did you decide to install solar power?

One of the Time Bank's members, Satya James, suggested getting solar panels for the centre's roof as part of a whole 'wishlist' of environmental improvements, all of which have now been completed. Satya was involved all along the way, from campaigning for the project, to helping to secure funding. **The centre tries its best to protect the environment, and the environmental projects encourage more people to come in and use the centre.** For example, the nature garden, with its stag beetle colony, is popular with visitors. As an organisation, however small, it's important to try to do something to help the environment so now – thanks to Satya's ideas – **'we also collect rainwater via three rainwater butts (each holding 700 litres), compost organic matter, collect cans and recycle as much as we can'.**

So how did you go about getting the panels? Was it expensive?

The community centre now has 22 solar panels on the south-facing roof. The panels were installed by Chelsfield Solar and officially launched in June 2006. They are self-cleaning and should last for 25

years. It was paid for with a £10,000 grant from Islington Council and match funding from the government's Clear Skies Initiative for renewable energy.

The centre has generated enough electricity to supply all our needs and to sell some to the National Grid as well. This gets credited against our energy bill so we save money. Since installing the system at the end of November 2005, we have produced around 2800 kWh of electricity which has reduced our CO₂ (carbon dioxide) emissions by about 1200 kg.

What does the centre want to do next?

The next sustainability project that we are looking to develop is the creation of a horticultural training scheme adjacent to the community centre. The interesting thing about this project is that it would involve the reclamation of a roadway and land currently used as a car park. We would like to be able to dig up the asphalt, create growing areas and erect an environmentally-friendly timber frame building, based on the principles of the architect Walter Segal, for training facilities.

This land has only ever been used for anti-social behaviour, such as fly tipping, prostitution, drug dealing, and racing stolen cars and motorbikes. So the project would have an extremely positive effect on the area which is surrounded by residential properties. We would be looking to train local people, including young people, in ecological horticultural practice and to extend this work onto the surrounding housing estates to improve the local area as a whole.

So what was the centre's best decision?

The best decision was to listen to a local mother of four children, with a passion for environmental issues, whose idea it was to draw up a 'wishlist' of ideas. We thought these ideas would be developed over several years, but in fact all have been achieved within two years.

Facts and Information

- For each kW peak of installed photovoltaic system, you can expect to save approximately 325kg of CO₂ per year (*Source: Energy Saving Trust*)
- Average domestic photovoltaic installations cost between £4-9,000 per kW peak of installed system (*Source: Energy Saving Trust*)

Further Resources

- Find **further community case studies** on the Community Action for Energy Website including the MKA Healthy Living Centre in Leicester which also used solar panels:
www.est.org.uk/uploads/documents/cafe/cafe%20case%20study%2021.pdf
- To find out more about **energy projects for your community** including funding support, training, contacts, advice and more case studies - contact the Community Action for Energy Team (CAfE) at 08701 261 444 or email them at CAfE@est.org.uk. You can also visit their website: www.est.org.uk/cafe
- The Clear Skies scheme has now been replaced by the **Low Carbon Buildings Programme**. For more information regarding grants for renewable energy installations, check www.lowcarbonbuildings.co.uk or call 0800 915 0990.
- For more specific information regarding **Solar Photovoltaic power**, take a look at the British Photovoltaic Association website: www.pv-uk.org.uk
- For information about **timber frame building**, see the Walter Segal Self Build Trust Website: www.segselfbuild.co.uk

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