

## HOW GREEN IS MY VILLAGE?

Green Village Project, Belstone, West Devon  
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*A tree planting day on the edge of Dartmoor as part of the Belstone Green Village project (Source: Westden)*

*There are lots of good ideas about how communities can live more sustainably. But if they are to be put into practice then individuals need to be motivated to make changes to how they live. Residents in the village of Belstone in West Devon are taking part in a project which gives them the chance to decide how they want to reduce their environmental impact.*

Tucked into a picturesque area of Dartmoor National Park in the Borough of West Devon, Belstone is a village with 260 inhabitants. It has a pub but other facilities such as the local shop, school and post office have closed. The nearest town, Okehampton, is five miles away.

The Green Village project was set up by a partnership between the sustainability organisation Westden and the University of Plymouth. But it is the residents who are actually taking charge, as Oz Osborne from Westden explains: 'Our role is to support the villagers. They have set up a steering group which includes a mix of residents such as young people, a farmer and parish councillors. They are in control of the project but we can help by doing things like convening meetings and getting funding.'



*A meeting of the Belstone Green Village project steering group (Source: Westden)*

Oz has observed that it took some time for residents to accept that this was the model and that there was no outside agenda that they needed to follow. But **once they realised that the direction of the project was up to them, there has been real enthusiasm and there are now enough people involved to drive the project along.** There are currently 24 different activities as part of the Green Village project, with villagers taking responsibility for one or more of these. Examples include energy audits of houses, local food days, a film by young people about life in Belstone, and a project where older people in the village share their ideas about how to live more sustainably – such as how to darn your own socks – based on their experiences of life during and after the Second World War.

Oz says that one of the main aims is 'to find out how you know if a project leads to change'. **Researchers from Plymouth University have undertaken surveys of household attitudes and behaviour before Green Village began, and are monitoring attitude and behaviour changes during the project and once it is complete. Based on the activities that have been taking place so far, it is already becoming clear that villagers are learning a lot about what sustainability is and how to put it into practice.**

So far he has been impressed by how willingly people are getting involved. **This enthusiasm is proving to be infectious: 'Villagers have become real advocates for the project and there is now lots of interest from other villages in the district.'**



*Children at the annual May Revels which was a chance to raise awareness of the Green Village project (Source: Westden)*

Oz recommends the supportive model of working adopted by the Green Village project as the way forward for encouraging people to get involved in sustainability activities. But he cautions that it requires facilitators, funders and other outsiders to change the way they work: 'You cannot stick to what you think is a set timetable and programme. You have to be flexible. Once a project starts there are so many influences and if you override these then you own the project and it runs contrary to the very reasons you set it up. Everything has to be done at the pace of the villagers involved.'

## Facts and Information

- The project is being facilitated by Westden ([www.westden.co.uk](http://www.westden.co.uk)), a charitable company, working with the Centre for Sustainable Futures at Plymouth University (<http://csf.plymouth.ac.uk>)
- Other organisations involved include Dartmoor National Park Authority ([www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)), West Devon Borough Council ([www.westdevon.gov.uk](http://www.westdevon.gov.uk)) and the Devon Association for Renewable Energy. ([www.devondare.org](http://www.devondare.org)).
- Westden co-ordinated the Local Agenda 21 process for West Devon.
- Awards for All (Lottery) have provided £7,000 of funding to pay for workshops, equipment and other resources. Most community groups are eligible to apply: <http://www.awardsforall.org.uk>

## Further Resources

- For more information on the project, visit [www.westden.co.uk/greenvillage.htm](http://www.westden.co.uk/greenvillage.htm).
- Another interesting project is Go Zero, based in Chew Magna in Somerset. Check out [www.gozero.org.uk](http://www.gozero.org.uk).
- Nearby Totnes has a Transition Town project underway which is tackling a range of issues including life after oil reserves begin to dwindle. Visit the website at [www.transitiontowns.org/Totnes](http://www.transitiontowns.org/Totnes).