

low carbon living

engaging and
communicating for
real results

a green paper

April 2011



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start here and now - the low carbon challenge



One home every minute

To meet the UK's 2050 target for reducing carbon emissions, one existing home will have to be retrofitted with energy saving measures every minute for the next forty years.¹

That means one household every minute also has to be encouraged, persuaded and helped to accept and work with these changes, to make the switch to low carbon living.

Or if you prefer, that's 11,000 homes and households converted each week. Existing homes make up about 27% of total UK carbon emissions - and most of these homes will still be in use in 2050.

It's a huge challenge - and getting the 'soft investment' in engagement and communications right will make all the difference between success and failure. Green messages have to come from trusted sources and be believable to give people the confidence and assurance they need.

This green paper sets out how residents, housing providers, contractors and suppliers can get the results they want. The finance and infrastructure to green the nation's homes will soon be in place through the Government's Green Deal, but are we ready to enlist the population's awareness and support for low carbon living?

TBG top tip

The clock is ticking for housing providers to act on climate change by greening their housing stock. If you don't yet have a clear strategy on how you're going to work with residents to achieve this, you need to start here and now.



¹ The UK Government has committed to a legally binding target of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 80% on 1990 levels by 2050. The interim target is a 34% reduction by 2020. Hitting these targets is everyone's business.



motivation - why we need to change



Changing our behaviour

It's tough but it's true - most households in the UK live a completely unsustainable lifestyle. We consume vastly more energy and produce much more waste than our planet can cope with. We have to change.

The hard way will be to carry on as we are and let soaring bills, interruptions to supply and fuel poverty force us to change our homes and habits.

The easier way is to face up to the need to change and start working together on it now. This calls for carefully planned communications and creative community engagement.

Changing behaviour is not just one way. As well as housing providers and energy

companies seeking to alter residents' and consumers' behaviour, they need to listen to how their customers want them to adapt. An organisation exhorting its customers to save energy shouldn't leave its office lights turned on all night!

Organisations promoting low carbon living should lead by example.

Different strokes for different folks

Some people may be persuaded to follow a lower carbon lifestyle for the sake of the global environment, but this won't motivate everyone.

To stand a chance of changing behaviours, we have to understand what people care about and what it would take to make them change. Recent research has shown that

people living in social rented homes are much more concerned about waste and rising gas and electricity prices, than they are about tackling climate change.²

TBG top tip

You need to find out what residents think through your customer insight and profiling. Once you know people's priorities, you can design engagement and communications to hit the right spots. Your messages about low carbon living have to be really explicit about how residents can gain and benefit - whether it's through lower fuel bills or other direct incentives and rewards.



² See http://www.procurementforhousing.co.uk/news/116/108/Successful_retrofit_must_include_more_choice_and_support_for_tenants_



making sense - use the right words



Learning low carbon language

Like all big and exciting things, campaigns for climate change have already developed their own language and jargon. From micro-generation to super-insulation there's a whole new lexicon for low carbon living.

Unfortunately, many people find these terms baffling and impenetrable. This, in turn, makes people less likely to embrace and cooperate with green initiatives.

There's already strong evidence that getting the words wrong can actually turn people off low carbon living, rather than galvanising them into action.³

Making it easy and attractive

A lot of the low carbon language already in use across the housing sector is problematic:

- 'changing behaviour' - sounds very top-down and parental
- 'retrofit' - sounds like we're going backwards
- 'programmes' - an unhealthy whiff of organisations doing things to customers and communities, rather than with them.

To gain acceptance and support from a disinterested or sceptical population, the words we use for low carbon living have to be nice and simple.

TBG top tip

As you develop your approach to engaging people in low carbon living, make sure you test out the words you use with residents at each stage. A one-hour customer focus group could save you lots of time and many thousands of pounds. As recent research on annual reports to residents has shown, glossaries and jargon busters are useful - but it's even better if you can use words people understand to start with!⁴

³ See <http://www.futerra.co.uk/downloads/Words-That-Sell.pdf>

⁴ The four national tenant organisations reviewed 'new style' annual reports to residents from tenants' perspective. See http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/upload/pdf/A_Good_Start_-_Could_do_Better_-_full_version.pdf





making it memorable - catch and keep people's attention



Learn from history

Take a look at the really successful behaviour change campaigns of the last few decades and you'll see that they all used simple, memorable visual brands and imagery.

- Digital TV switchover - that annoying little robot
- Tell Sid - the brand that promoted the privatisation of British Gas and turned people onto the idea of owning shares
- Don't die of ignorance - tombstone shock tactics that woke us up to the dangers of HIV and AIDS.

To keep low carbon living at the front of people's minds, it really helps to give your strategy its own, distinctive name and identity. This huge change that we're striving for has to be called something and be instantly recognisable.

Take care

Great brands rarely spring from nowhere. They're normally the product of lots of careful thought, research and expertise. Some housing providers, like Worthing Homes' Relish partnership have made a good start.⁵

A great slogan or strapline can give your brand give extra 'oomph'. 'Clunk click every trip' transformed a nation's driving safety. 'Five a day' has at least got healthy eating into people's consciousness.

TBG top tip

Think hard about the messages you want to project and involve your target audience(s) in helping you design, develop and roadtest your brand. Investing in this up front will definitely payback later through greater take-up and reduced resistance to change.



⁵ See <http://www.relish.org/>



leaders - every journey starts with a single step



The long march to low carbon living

Greening the nation's homes and changing people's lifestyles won't happen in hurry - we're in this for the long haul. So, we need inspirational leaders and early adopters to show us the way.

For housing providers, this means building up relationships with residents who have a real commitment to low carbon living and households who can demonstrate its benefits.

These 'green champions' can be engaged through working groups, as advocates, advisers and inspectors, online through social media groups or on the phone through text campaigns and telephone conferences.

Peer communications

Resident-to-resident communication about low carbon living stands a much greater chance of success than messages from institutions and authority. Building community support - home by home - will help people reach their tipping point to act on climate change.

TBG top tip

Your low carbon community leaders are gold dust - so you need to invest in them. Offer training and coaching in media awareness and presentation skills to help them succeed as spokespeople. As campaigns like Make Poverty History has shown, telling the personal stories of how individuals and their families are affected by global problems is often the best way to build understanding.⁶

⁶ Remember those white wristbands in 2005? Make Poverty History is still campaigning and transforming people's lives. See <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/takeaction>





dialogue - it's part of the day job



Reaching everyone

To really make a difference, the low carbon habit needs to reach out beyond the green pioneers, to become part of everyone's service experience and job.

Tackling climate change needs to be part of the core, daily dialogue between housing providers and residents - as much as repairs and rents.

This means getting low carbon living onto the agenda for every residents and community group, every service panel and every committee and governing body.

Call in the experts

Your housing staff may have the interpersonal and involvement skills to lead this dialogue, but they may not have the specialist knowledge about energy efficiency or the high-level influencing ability needed to close the deal.

There are a growing number of expert agencies offering training and support in this area. Marches Energy is a charitable social enterprise who've developed a wide range of tailored tools and techniques.⁷

The Bridge Group can offer the specialist engagement, marketing, communications and design that you need.

TBG top tip

If it hasn't already happened, make this year your low carbon launch year and give it top billing in your customer and community involvement plans. Think about how green initiatives can form part of your local service offers.



⁷ See <http://www.meo.org.uk/>



diversity - sort out your segments



Apply some social marketing theory

Diversity ranks high on most housing providers values and priorities. And many organisations work in exceptionally diverse communities, providing services to a complex patchwork of different ethnic, social, economic and cultural groups.

Low carbon living creates a great opportunity to put this commitment to diversity into real-life practice.

In marketing terms, you need to identify and understand the needs of different segments within your customer base and communities. Apart from the familiar segmentation by age, sex, gender, race and income, each of these groups will contain a mix of attitudes and beliefs about climate change and the need for low carbon living.⁸

This means getting to grips with the trade-offs that exist for every individual between:

- Being able and willing to change long standing habits

For example, “I’m willing to consider renewable energy for my home, but am not able to afford or arrange it on my own.”

- Likelihood of taking up green opportunities against their impact

For example, “I’m likely to put extra insulation and ventilation in my home, but if I don’t use it properly, it won’t have much impact.”

TBG top tip

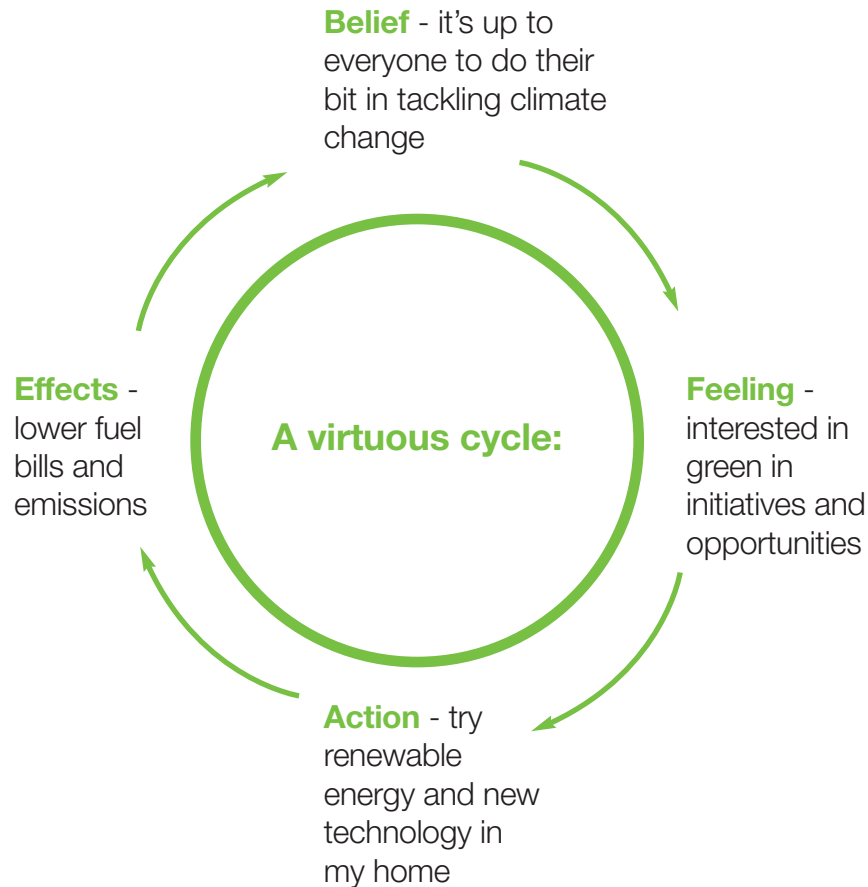
People will respond to and be persuaded by different things. This largely depends on who they are, their background and their circumstances. As a housing provider, you should already have a lot of valuable information about customers that you can use to target your low carbon communications and engagement. And if you haven’t, start collecting, engaging and communicating now.

⁸The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs report ‘A framework for pro-environmental behaviours’ stratifies people into different categories from ‘Positive Greens’ to ‘Honestly Disengaged’. See <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/behaviour/documents/behaviours-jan08-report.pdf>



Beliefs shape actions

Behavioural theory suggests that it's often what we believe that has most effect on our actions. This can be a positive or a negative when it comes to encouraging low carbon living.





education - if you think it's expensive, try the alternative!



Not just bricks and mortar

In the rush to tackle the physical changes to housing assets needed to reduce carbon emissions and cut fuel bills, we mustn't forget the people who actually live in the homes undergoing green improvements.

Unless residents welcome, understand and know how to use the new features and technology in their homes, then they simply won't work.

One housing association, puzzled by a demonstration eco-house failing to deliver the expected savings, discovered that the resident - a smoker - opened the windows each time she had a cigarette!

As renewable energy, heating and ventilation technologies develop, the key to making them work will be occupiers' ability to use high-tech, integrated controls effectively. So housing providers need to invest in continuous learning and refreshers for staff and residents.

Education should form part of community development strategies - to create links with schools, colleges and educationalists of all sorts. Anyone who has regular contact with young people (whether face to face or online) should be supporting the low carbon message.⁹

The good news is, there's an expanding range of courses, qualifications and advice available from accredited providers.

The phenomenal rise of digital and social media like Twitter, facebook and LinkedIn has also opened up completely new ways of reaching audiences and building communities of interest. The switch to digital-only-TV and new generation mobile smartphones will see these opportunities expand even faster.

⁹Flagship Housing Group's 'turn it off!' campaign is an interactive roadshow taken out to local primary schools. It uses a film, game and gifts for children. See <http://www.flagship-housing.co.uk/main.cfm?type=GTA>





Education for experts

Customers working alongside housing providers as 'low carbon champions' can particularly benefit from training and education. Apart from boosting their ability to act as community advocates and advisors, this will equip people to get the thousands of 'green collar' jobs predicted to flow from the shift to a low carbon economy.

TBG top tip

One thing is for sure - today's children and young people will soon become tomorrow's families and households. Their actions will ultimately decide if we make the step change in energy use and carbon emissions to hit the 2050 target. Your low carbon living strategy needs to 'catch 'em young' and encourage the right habits from an early age.





rewarding change - give people something



Gift aid

If you want to change people's behaviour, you need to give or offer them something tangible and valuable in return. Recent public change programmes on digital television, energy efficiency and the smoking ban have all offered free benefits (Freeview, low-energy lightbulbs and outdoor 'smoking solutions'), which have helped to overcome resistance and make the new behaviours simple, attractive and normal.

Low carbon living needs a similar range of relevant gifts and incentives - both as 'introductory offers' to change behaviour and 'loyalty rewards' to reinforce and sustain new habits.

Be creative, but careful

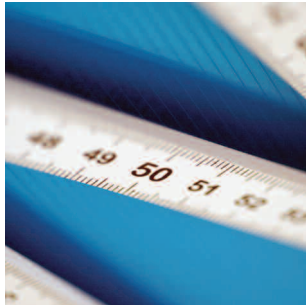
Think carefully about what you offer people as incentives and gifts. It's better to offer something that's inexpensive, but useful and directly related to the behaviour you're seeking to influence, than something too ostentatious.

Residents are rightly sensitive to how housing providers spend their money. Try to persuade energy companies and other suppliers to meet these costs, but otherwise tread carefully and test out how people will react to different rewards with a sample of residents.

TBG top tip

If you've already got a customer rewards scheme, give it a boost by introducing new benefits to recognise and reward pro-environmental behaviour. If you don't have a reward scheme, then low-carbon living is an ideal launchpad to offer a new deal to residents.





measuring success - feel the difference



Positive payback

Investing in low carbon living - whether in the hard, physical improvements or the soft, communications and behaviour change is going to cost money. So you need to make sure it works and you get a real return on the resources you put in.

Build it in

Housing providers should already have systems in place to carry out at least annual impact assessments of customer and community involvement. These may not include engagement in green issues though, so now is a good time to refresh your approach and make sure your measurements and impact report cover low carbon living.

Communications strategies should also have monitoring built in - to check the penetration and success of different activities and media. Sample telephone and online surveys, readers groups and media targets can all help. But again, these may not cover environmental messages at the moment, so will also need to be reviewed and updated.

A number of specialist evaluation approaches have started to emerge, most notably SHIFT - the Sustainable Homes Index For Tomorrow. SHIFT is a partnership, which provides members with independent accreditation, benchmarking, a best practice network and peer learning.¹⁰

TBG top tip

The secret of all evaluation is to be really clear about what you're seeking to achieve to start with - and then look hard for evidence of whether it's happened. Within each bit of engagement and communication, you need to check how people's attitudes and behaviours change - and what caused them to shift.



¹⁰ For more about the SHIFT Index, see <http://www.sustainablehomes.co.uk/shiftmembers20102011.aspx>



contact us

Wherever you're at on the journey to low carbon living, The Bridge Group can help you go further.

Our unique blend of housing and engagement expertise, plus our communications, PR, marketing and design skills and grasp of green issues means we can offer hands-on help where you need it most.

Our sister company, Vu-Creative provides cutting-edge digital and online games, surveys and applications that can capture the interest, attention and views of your stakeholders in a fresh, fun way.

So if you're thinking green: choose orange - contact The Bridge Group.

For any queries about this green paper, low carbon living or any aspect of engagement and communications, please contact **Ian Hembrow** on **08165 861664** or **i.hembrow@bridge-group.co.uk**

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