



Successful energy saving open homes events

An organisers guide



energy saving trust®

Executive summary

People who have completed energy improvement measures have been opening their homes up to the public for some years. These initiatives have been encouraging visitors to engage in the energy improvement opportunities for their own homes.

There are an increasing number of organisations and groups who enable this activity to happen, many of whom are identified in this document. We collectively refer to these initiatives as energy saving open homes.

Energy saving open home events are an effective way to engage on the relatively complex subject of sustainable refurbishment. Visually seeing the measures and talking directly to the homeowners proves to be a very real stimulus to help people decide on their own actions.

Here at the Energy Saving Trust we know they are effective through working first hand with the expert and passionate people who are delivering successful events and have done so for a number of years. We supported the opening of 80 open homes in 2010 and evidence indicates they provide a vital assurance role in encouraging visitors to take action in their own homes.

Assurance is gained from the home-owners themselves, who have experienced the challenges of researching appropriate materials, finding suitable contractors and going through often disruptive major

refurbishment works in their own homes. Stories are mostly positive but the value of these events is that home-owners stories are real.

Event organisers often choose an appropriate standard to ensure visitors get the experience they expect and this can vary from a 60% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions set by the Old Home SuperHome network to a minimum of two upgrade measures from a list.

Not only are these events positive for the visitors, we have also seen first-hand how this type of activity can support the supply chain. Some open homes events ensure experts well versed in the technologies are on hand. The events have also boosted business for solar installers, builders and building merchants to name but a few and these companies are deriving clear benefits from their support.

Our vision is to see more of this activity happening throughout the UK to support the drive to achieve wide-scale sustainable retrofit of housing.

The experiences of expert practitioners have enabled us to compile this guide. We hope it will be a valuable resource to support community organisations, local authorities and businesses to plan and deliver successful activities themselves. We hope it will be a useful manual, and will support more energy saving open home activity across the UK.



*Guided tours as part of the Green Buildings in Norfolk
- Open Days*

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Introduction

The challenges of climate change, peak oil and fuel poverty mean the need to cut carbon and reduce our dependence on traditional fuels is growing.

The UK government has shown its commitment, by promising an 80% cut in carbon emissions (from 1990 levels) by 2050. As well as these top-level changes, many homeowners have been taking matters into their own hands.

By taking basic steps such as switching to low-energy lightbulbs, or turning off appliances when they are not in use, for example, most homeowners can save on fuel bills and make a difference.

However, some have gone the 'extra mile'. By doing research, applying for grants, adding insulation, upgrading boilers and installing renewable energy technologies, they are making their homes fit for the future and far more comfortable in winter.

Others, working with local architects and builders, are building 'ecohomes' from scratch. They're using low-impact, locally sourced materials and an approach that makes best use of natural light, heat and rainwater.

Businesses, local authorities, housing associations and community groups are also getting on board. They are converting premises for the future, retrofitting old council houses and building village halls in a sustainable way.

Whatever our interest in energy efficiency, there's a lot to be learned from visiting energy saving open homes, and hearing from the people that live in them. It shows us how measures might work in our own living spaces and gives us a chance to talk to an impartial homeowner about the costs and benefits.

This is why open home events have been springing up across the UK. Whilst energy saving open homes is the collective term for these events, a variety of names are used by local groups including Eco Open Homes, Green Doors and Green Buildings Open Days for example.

These events give privileged access to private homes that have energy-efficient measures or renewable energy technologies in place. Open home events are attended by thousands of people every year in areas such as Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Faringdon, Llanidloes, Oxford, and Stroud.

Surveys have shown that they lead to action. In some areas, as many as 83% of visitors responded by taking practical steps to improve energy efficiency in their own homes. The events also act as a stimulus for the 'green economy' of traders and installers.

This guide has been produced by the Energy Saving Trust in conjunction with organisers who have already run energy saving open home events. It is designed to share insights and lessons learnt with anyone interested in arranging events themselves – from individuals through to community groups, local business groups, Local Authorities and even Green Deal providers.

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"A general attitude of helpfulness and huge generosity with sharing knowledge. Thoroughly enjoyable and very impressive."

(Mendip visitor)

"I was pleased to participate, I felt shattered afterwards, but it was fantastic to be part of the eco-houses camaraderie."

(Oxfordshire homeowner)
.....



Visitors taking part in Brighton & Hove Eco Open Houses

It starts with a basic overview of an open homes event for first-time organisers. It then focuses on seven key steps – from funding, to finding homes, to volunteers and evaluation – with an indication of timescales. There are hints and tips from those who have already run successful events plus case studies at the back of the guide to show what's already happening around the country.

An open homes event is an effective way to inspire action, stimulate local supply chains and inform policy-makers. We hope this guide will help all event organisers, both new and established, and support public access to a national network of energy saving open homes.

Statistics

Since attending an event in 2007, 2008 or 2009, 83% of respondents had already taken practical steps to make their home more energy efficient, ranging from simple behaviour changes to adding insulation and purchasing renewable energy technologies.

Norfolk evaluation 2010

72% of respondents said that they had learned something new about insulation (Oxford report 2007); 64% of respondents said they learned something new about solar and other renewable energy systems.

Mendip evaluation 2008

What is an energy saving open homes event?

Energy saving homes are either new-build or existing homes that have had energy-efficiency and/or water conservation measures applied. These could range from basic insulation to the latest in renewable energy technologies.

An energy saving open homes event is typically arranged by an environmental organisation, community group or local authority. It's a way both to promote energy saving solutions and increase understanding of climate change issues. Homeowners who have carried out energy efficiency works may be approached by the organisers and asked to open up their homes to the public over a given week or weekend.

Typically, for an event centred around a rural area or market town, at least six homes will be open. For a city-wide event, between 12 and 20 homes is more common, with some places offering more than 50 homes over one weekend. Whatever the scale of the event, it is useful to showcase a diverse range of measures and technologies to cater for visitors' interests.

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"It's a wonderful penny-drop moment when you encounter a good idea in practice and think, 'Oh! I could do that!'"

(Bristol visitor)

"Weekends like these are great...it heightens the reality that there is a rapidly growing market for sustainable construction and energy efficient living."

(Brighton & Hove homeowner)

"A wonderful idea – very inspiring and valuable to get feedback from people who have done it."

(Oxfordshire visitor)
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Some events look to offer guided tours at set times, which are booked online or by phone. Other schemes offer drop-in sessions, where the house is open for a morning or afternoon and visitors turn up at their leisure. Yet others operate a mixture of both guided tours and drop-in times, or even cycle tours or guided trails.

Once homeowners are happy with the plans, the event is advertised throughout the local community. Brochures, leaflets and posters will show pictures of the homes, brief descriptions, opening times and any booking information.

More detailed information about the homes' building materials, installed technologies and energy performance are often available on the organising group's website. This means people can choose the homes they want to visit or prepare specific questions for the homeowner in advance of their visit.

Partner organisations with joint strategic aims are often involved in delivering events. They provide advice on a steering group or offer specific pro-bono work. It's also possible to secure commercial sponsorship from the type of company that will directly benefit from being linked with the event.

On the day, visitors are usually met at the home by a staff member or volunteer from the organising group, or the homeowner. Visitors often get handouts about the building's features, or see information pinned up at relevant places in the house. It's common for photos, videos, architects' plans, material samples, installer guides, supplier contacts and fuel bills to be made available for study too. In some instances, the architect, builder or installer may also be present.

At 'drop-in' style events, visitors can wander through the house or are shown around in small groups by volunteers or the homeowner. Events which offer booked, guided tours will begin at a set time for all visitors and an in-depth tour and talk by the homeowner about the building can last over an hour.

These events give visitors an invaluable chance to see, touch and feel how measures might work in their own home. Some visitors come for inspiration, some with specific questions about technologies. Others may want to know about savings, or want contacts of reliable suppliers and installers. Many people visit more than one building during the event as they seek answers, and some will follow up with homeowners directly afterwards if homeowners are happy with this approach.

Most schemes include an element of evaluation. Surveys may be conducted on the doorstep as people are leaving the home, or are conducted online after the event is over. Results are often powerful, with statistics in some areas showing an 83% conversion rate to action.

In most cases, homeowners are enthusiastic enough to give their time for free. Organising groups sometimes give gifts to homeowners after the event, or organise a thank you meal for all those involved. Although it may seem surprising, where there are annual schemes, homeowners are happy to open up their homes to the public year-on-year. Indeed, many report that they get as much out of it as the visitors!

"Attending the Open Day in 2007 was a major trigger in my deciding to do an MBA in Strategic Carbon Management, thereby changing my career."

(Norfolk visitor)

"I found it brilliant to see simple and reasonably cheap ways of making changes that had actually been put into place in a house of similar construction to my own."

(Bristol visitor)

Statistics

Since attending an event in 2007, 2008 or 2009, 83% of respondents had already taken practical steps to make their home more energy efficient, ranging from simple behaviour changes to adding insulation and purchasing renewable energy technologies.

(Norfolk evaluation 2010)

98% of respondents agreed that 'touch-and-feel' visits are a good way of learning about solutions.

(Old Home SuperHome evaluation 2010)

85% of respondents said that they were inspired to do more in their own homes following their visit.

(Stroud evaluation 2008)

76% of respondents had a general interest in sustainability and nearly 40% cited an interest in saving money or in planning a project as being motivations to visit open homes.

(Bristol evaluation 2010)

If every action pledged on the event feedback forms were taken, all the households concerned could together save 4,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide and £475,000 from heat and £31,000 from electricity bills in just three years.

(Brighton & Hove evaluation 2008)

76% of respondents had a general interest in sustainability and nearly 40% cited an interest in saving money or in planning a project as being motivations to visit open homes.

(Bristol evaluation 2010)

Seven step guide to a successful event

Step 1. Key decisions

Start: 8-12 months before event

Energy saving open home events can take different forms. They depend on the target audience, the objectives of the organising group and budget/resources. Before you formally approach homeowners, there are some key issues to consider.

Governance

If you want to be able to receive funding, you will need a bank account and a relevant governing structure. Existing groups or local authorities seeking to organise energy saving open home events will already have these formalities in place, whereas new ventures should consider working with a partner organisation that could provide them. If you want to be independent, setting up a Community Interest Company (CIC) or not-for-profit company is an option. It provides a framework similar to a charity, but one which is lightly regulated and more suited to social enterprise.

Steering groups

Setting up a steering group will help focus your ideas, set wider objectives and share the workload. You may have the inspiration, but others may have the contacts, the expertise or simply the clout to get things done quicker than you could alone. A sounding board when difficult decisions need to be made and to evaluate feedback is invaluable too. For larger events, steering groups can also help with business planning, budgeting and marketing strategy.

When recruiting, think about organisations with similar strategic aims, as well as personal contacts from the local community who would be ideally placed to support the event. We suggest a steering group of between six and eight people, meeting every two to three weeks in the early stages, and in place for the duration of the event.

When to hold the event

One of the first decisions to make is when to hold the event. It is best to choose a single week or weekend, so that publicity can be focused and visitors can visit a number of homes in one go.

Many open eco-home schemes are organised during the second week in September to link in with the Heritage Open Days (HOD). This automatically links you with much wider publicity, allowing your tours to appear on the national HOD website and take advantage of the media interest. HOD will also give you free bespoke insurance cover (see below) if your homeowners complete a simple risk assessment. However, in cities where hundreds of buildings are already open to the public for HOD tours, there can be a danger of your event being lost in the crowd. So consider this carefully. HOD also falls during student holidays, so if you are hoping to attract student volunteers, bear this in mind.

Locality and types of homes

A community-based event for a village, town or city, with many homes opening within streets of each other, will allow people to visit many places during one day and encourage walking and cycling. Alternatively, a county-wide event will bring in a greater diversity of projects and be of potential interest to a wider group of people. Consider what kind of buildings you want to promote: this may influence how wide you spread your net. For example if you're promoting measures for ordinary homes, then simple retrofit and refurbishment projects should be easy to find locally. However if you want to include self-built homes, a wider range of natural building materials (straw, cob, earth) or social housing models, you may need to look wider.

Booked tours

These require online or telephone booking systems, an extra and very significant piece of administration. A partner organisation with a call centre or web team may be able to help with this. Booked tours give the homeowner more control over visitor numbers. Also, arguably, they result in more educational value as they give the homeowner more time to explain the project and provide more opportunity for discussion in a small, focused group. Evaluation and follow-up with visitors is also improved as all contact details will be captured upon booking. However, booked tours do limit visitor numbers and popular homes may get booked up very quickly. Booked tours also rely on people showing up on the day, which is not always guaranteed.



Homeowner and visitors at Bristol Green Doors

Drop-in events

These can attract greater numbers and allow people to decide on the day whether to come, as well as attracting passers-by. Houses can get full, which creates a great atmosphere but can be difficult to manage. Conversely, houses can also be empty and there is no way of knowing how many people will show up, so drop-in events are hard to plan for.

Insurance

As an organiser, you will need to have public liability insurance, in the unlikely event of an insurance claim. HOD automatically provides events with liability insurance which they say will cover claims for accident/injury to visitors, damage to contents, damage to property, and theft – so this is a good option if you are in any doubt. Otherwise, you can buy your own public liability insurance from an independent broker (for example Zurich Insurance runs an affordable package for community groups) or run the event in partnership with your local council. But do check the policies for the details.

Homeowners should note that their ordinary home insurance will not likely cover for theft, as people have been allowed into the house voluntarily. So they should ensure that all valuables are put away. However to date, no open homes event has ever reported such an incident.

How did they do it? - Hints and tips from other organisers

"Two unpaid project managers backed by a team of volunteers ran the project. They were aided by a steering group made up of representatives from key local organisations with shared strategic aims and with whom formal partnerships developed. Some funding came from these sources and commercial sponsorship was secured to provide additional funds and pro bono work. A Community Interest Company was set up to provide a robust governance structure. As the project progressed, a number of high profile supporters came forward including the head of the city council Barbara Janke, Stephen Williams MP and Alastair Sawday." *Bristol Green Doors CIC, organisers of Bristol Green Doors*

"A core group of volunteers from the Transition Energy group, Transition Stroud, Stroud Valleys Project and SWEA met on several occasions to put together the plans for the weekend of 'Eco-Renovation Open Homes'. They also met with many others like homeowners, designers, Exchange members and District Council officers to organise the event. Meetings were held with Ecotricity who took on the printing of the leaflets and set up an Affinity Scheme, donating £25 to Transition Stroud every time a household transfers or joins Ecotricity."

Transition Stroud, organisers of the Stroud Eco Renovation Open Homes Weekend

Seven step guide to a successful event

Step 2. Finding homes

Start: 8-12 months before event

Events with two or three interesting properties open for the day can be just as valuable as larger events, so don't worry if you can't find many properties instantly. Quality, not quantity, counts. You can always find more for next year. That said, once you start looking, you may be surprised what you find...

Finding homes - registers and records

Organisations that may have registers of energy-efficient buildings in the area include the Sustainable Energy Academy (including the Old Home SuperHome Network), the AECB (the sustainable building association), the Retrofit for the Future project run by the Technology Strategy Board, RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects), RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors), CIBSE (Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers) and the National Energy Foundation.

Planning officers at your council's local planning department may recall planning applications for eco-renovations or new-build green homes. Councils also sometimes have local awards schemes for green design.



Guided tours as part of the Green Buildings in Norfolk - Open Days

Finding homes - word of mouth

Alongside these more formal routes, put the word out. Speak to local environmental organisations, climate change networks or transition town groups. They can

often give you names and addresses or put an email around to their members. Put out a press release asking for people to step forward. Keep an eye on the local press, as more ambitious local eco-projects are sometimes featured. A stand at a local green trade fair or exhibition can also help identify people. Make phone calls to local architects, installers and building suppliers. They may be able to provide you with customer details of local enthusiasts. Failing that, keep your eyes open. Green technologies and sustainable buildings are often visible from the roadside.

Finding homes - social housing

Building regulations for social housing are ahead of private housing in terms of energy and water efficiency. Many exemplar social housing projects are being completed across the country as part of the Retrofit for the Future competition. Although more lead-in time is needed (in order to get the necessary permissions from a range of partners including council tenants) tours of new or retrofit social housing projects can be very worthwhile. They often showcase a range of measures, are extensively monitored and provide a range of different perspectives.

Setting standards

The selection process can be informal. You may consider it enough for a homeowner to simply have done something 'green' and be willing to show others. However, your event will have more credibility if you set a benchmark on which to evaluate the homes taking part. For example, the Old Homes SuperHome network insists that homes demonstrate a 60% reduction in CO₂ emissions. Similarly, you may ask homeowners to demonstrate savings on their fuel bills or electricity/gas/water usage. Or you may ask homeowners to tick four basic energy-saving measures (such as recycling, composting, low energy lighting, insulation improvements, draughtproofing or renewable technologies) from a prepared list. Whatever your benchmark, you can then refer to these criteria when advertising the event, and publish any data you collect.

Gathering information for the event

You can be confident asking homeowners to take part. In most cases they are happy to do so. Energy-saving and environmental issues are normally some of their core values, and they are keen to share these with others.

If you can, visit them and sign them up in principle to being involved in the event. Then, use a form, telephone interview or online registration process to gather all of the information you need. Start with basic contact details, the address of the property and any directions or parking information that are needed (this will mostly only apply to very rural properties). You should also establish disabled access. Then offer each homeowner the same choice of opening hours or tour times across the days of the event and sign them up to as many as they can commit to (they don't have open for the whole event).

For booked tours, agree tour sizes (suggest a minimum of 10 or 15 people) and confirm who will be taking the tour (for new-build it may be more appropriate to have the architect or builder).

Preparing case studies

For basic advertising, ask the homeowner to write a paragraph about the property, list the relevant features and provide a good quality photo (300dpi, around 1MB). If you are keen to collect data about the homes or publish more detailed information as case studies on a website, then prepare a set of standard questions to ask about the energy performance of the home, the technical specification of measures/technologies and supplier contacts. This should link with any of the standards that you have set for inclusion (see above).

Check that the homeowner is happy for his address to be advertised and these details about the property to be published on a website. Check also that the homeowner is happy to be contacted by the press or have journalists turn up on the day.

How did they do it? - Hints and tips from other organisers

"The vast majority of the homes were identified by volunteer members of the partner organisations, through their own personal acquaintances and networking. The selection of homes to include was very informal, and a wide range of building styles, ages and features were included, all of which had one or more energy-efficient features. The decision was made not to include commercial or other non-residential buildings, as the working group wanted to keep the focus on homes."

Mendip Environment, organisers of Mendip Open Green Homes and Gardens

"The eco houses were identified in a number of ways. Some were projects the organisers knew of already through living and working in the area and some they were involved in developing and building. They reached a few houses through a press release too, but mainly these were projects they already knew about. Houses needed to have at least a minimum standard of sustainability to participate – for example good insulation (of walls, ceiling and floor), glazing, renewable energy installations, and water efficiency measures. Mainly they needed to be interesting projects that could inspire visitors to take action."

Brighton & Hove Eco Open Houses report 2008

Seven step guide to a successful event

Step 3. Funding the event

Start: 8-12 months before the event

Although open home events are generally made possible by a network of goodwill, volunteering effort and community spirit, you will inevitably need some funding. Donations from trusts and sponsorship arrangements with local businesses can generate income, while pro-bono work by partner organisations can lessen the costs.

Costs

Some of the costs involved in running an open homes event are: design and print of publicity material (leaflets, posters or brochures); postage (letters to homeowners, distribution of publicity material); website design; launch events; signage; staff time and volunteer expenses; gifts or thank you events for homeowners; and independent evaluation reports. Budget this out before you begin. As a guide, a small scheme run by volunteers may need £500 for publicity material and expenses. Larger schemes with a part-time member of staff and evaluation reporting have run to £10,000. City-wide schemes can cost in excess of £20,000 – still considered an inexpensive approach for influencing large numbers of people to potentially save vast sums of money (and CO₂) collectively.

Partners

Other organisations working in the same field may be inspired to help deliver the event with you, offering time and professional support without charge. As well as being part of a steering group, there are many other ways they could get involved. For example, local building firms, technology installers, energy assessors or architects may help you identify suitable buildings and interpret technical information. Local members of AECB (the Sustainable Building Association) may also recommend homes or provide expertise.

Businesses, local authorities or local newspapers may be able to help with marketing, sharing web space or printing leaflets in-house. University environmental departments or transition town groups may be able to provide willing volunteers to help on the day. You

may also consider which organisations you would strategically like to appear as partners to give your event credence and reliability.

Sponsors

Many open home events have attracted sponsorship from business. Examples include renewable energy technology installers, local builders (both small and large), building merchants, local architects and energy companies (such as NPower and EDF). These organisations have an interest in having their logo/ advertising on publicity material for the event, or their leaflets available on the day.

Draw up a list of local businesses and write or phone with details of the event. Enthuse them about the event, be clear what you can offer them and have a figure in mind. For example, a small local solar supplier may be willing to give £500 for his logo on your website and leaflets on the day. Alternatively, you could ask for a meeting with a larger company, take along your projected costs and ask how they could help. Local printing firms may also give you a reduction on printing in return for some free advertising.

Trusts and public funding

Many private trusts and foundations are keen to support initiatives which educate communities on environmental issues or support low carbon action. Applications will need to be sent early, in many cases at least six months before your event starts, as trusts can only meet once or twice a year to determine applications. It's also worth exploring public funding from relevant government departments or initiatives such as the Big Lottery Fund. The GRANTfinder database is the most up-to-date source of trust and public funding opportunities. You can often get access to it via local authority offices or volunteer bureaux. The Directory of Social Change also sells handbooks on local and national trusts and has search facilities available from its website.



Trade Fair as part of Stroud Eco Renovation Open Homes

Charging and donations

If you have decided to work with Heritage Open Days, your tours need to be advertised as free (it is a condition of HOD). You can still ask for donations on the day, or suggest a donation for entry. £2 per person is a common figure.

Alternatively, you could set a price per tour or sell a weekend pass allowing access to all homes. Although there is little evidence to suggest this will affect the attendance of people who are looking for specific advice, it may put off those who are less aware of the issues. However, significantly, events have raised over £1,500 from charging. Whilst some organisers have given homeowners the choice of keeping the money raised from their property, they have found that most donate it back to the organising group anyway.

How did they do it? - Hints and tips from other organisers

"The main costs of Mendip Open Green Homes and Gardens were for project management and website development, and capital costs included design and printing of leaflets, flyers and road signs, and administrative costs. The total cost of the project was in the region of £10,500 but it should be noted that a great deal of time was given voluntarily by various individuals. Funding for the project came from a number of sources including Mendip Strategic Partnership, Somerset County Council's renewable energy advice service, Somerset County Councillors (through the Community Budget scheme), Wessex Water (via a Conservation Foundation grant scheme) and The Sustainable Energy Academy. Businesses which had been recommended by householders were also approached, and asked if they would sponsor the scheme, which resulted in donations from two companies."

Mendip Environment, organisers of Mendip Open Green Homes and Gardens

"We presented the idea early to small groups to get feedback and put the word out. A few weeks later we held a public launch which functioned simultaneously as a recruitment drive netting householders, volunteers and potential sponsors. We gauged interest and this enabled us to develop a range of sponsorship packages with different opportunities reflecting the ability of smaller businesses to get involved. Their uptake came about for a range of reasons and most were known to us from early days. One of the great things about sponsorship in this area is that it clearly is mutually beneficial to both parties. All our sponsors did well out of the event."

Bristol Green Doors CIC, organisers of Bristol Green Doors

Seven step guide to a successful event

Step 4. Publicity

Start: 2–4 months before the event

Allow yourself a good lead-in time. Researching homes in the area, gathering images and information back from the homeowners and making sponsorship arrangements will take a good few months. However, there will come a point when you know you need to commit the event to paper and start the promotion.



Kevin McCloud (centre) helping to promote Stroud Eco Renovation Open Homes

Producing publicity material

Some groups have all of the key information about the event on a website, and then use advertising (eye-catching posters or adverts in the local press) to direct people to the website. Other groups print leaflets or brochures (which are VAT excluded) with full details of the event, listing the houses with an image and brief description for each, and showing addresses, opening times and any booking information. They then distribute these widely through the local community. Whichever approach is best for you, try to pick a single, memorable image and description which can be carried across all websites, posters, leaflets and advertisements. And don't forget to mention the organising group, sponsors and partner organisations.

Distributing printed material

As well as putting up posters and distributing brochures in the local community (in community centres, pubs, churches, newsagents or cafes), try to

reach wider places. In rural areas, networks of farm shops are often happy to put bundles of leaflets on the counter. The central library service can usually take a box of leaflets and distribute to all libraries in the county. Councils may also deliver leaflets to libraries, as well as to municipal buildings in their area. Environment centres or sustainably-built public buildings, anywhere in the county, provide a ready-made target audience. Make sure they have posters and leaflets on display.

Building societies and banks like the Co-operative Bank sometimes have charity noticeboards for posters. Councils or advice centres may also be able to include your leaflet in a public mailing. Professional leaflet distribution companies, if affordable, can fill leaflet racks throughout a city and save a lot of time. Homeowners may also be willing to have a poster up in their window and distribute leaflets locally.

Email circulars and web advertising

This is a simple way to target hundreds of people who will be interested in the event. Prepare an email with information about the properties, opening times and any booking information. Attach electronic versions of leaflets or posters (not too large – around 1MB) to the email and point people to the web address. Then, send it out to your mailing lists and key contacts.

But use other organisations like the Women's Institute, Universities and Colleges, parish councils, architects associations, other climate change or environmental organisations, and the local tourist information service too. Ask them to distribute it to their members/networks or include the information on their website or in their next electronic newsletter. Sponsors and partner organisations can also distribute information through their networks. Remember also to submit details of your open homes to the Heritage Open Days website, if relevant.

Displays, shows and trade fairs

Putting a display about energy efficiency in a public place like a library or the Town Hall, can help attract people who would perhaps not otherwise hear about

the event. Leaflets about the event should be freely available, whether the stand is manned or not. Also, taking a pitch at a local environment fair or county show can be very worthwhile: you will reach hundreds of people in one day.

Press

Open home events usually do well in the local press. They tick a number of boxes – they're green, they're local, they're about people and they're community events. Try to include all of these elements when writing press releases. Talk to the press early and aim for an initial, double-page feature to launch the event, followed by a few follow-up articles on buildings or homeowners with a story to tell. As well as the newsdesk, think about contacting the Property or Homes section, 'green' columnists and events listings. Local glossy magazines will need plenty of lead-in time but are also worth considering as they have good readership.

Radio stations are usually happy to promote the event in advance, perhaps recording an interview with a homeowner. TV stations can sometimes be persuaded out on the day, especially if you are providing a 'green' angle on the wider Heritage Open Days event. All in all, for booked events, aim to reach the public as soon as you are starting to take bookings, maybe four or six weeks beforehand. Otherwise, aim for the majority of press in the lead up to the event, starting one or two weeks before and continuing through to the day itself.

Operating booking systems

If you or a partner organisation are taking bookings, ensure the system is in place before publicity goes out. An online booking system will be simplest, but there should also be a telephone number given in case of enquiries. Telephone bookings are best done from a dedicated phone number, as there can be a high call volume at peak times (usually after media stories).

If callers haven't read the advertising, direct them first to the website or post them a leaflet and ask them to call again. Once a booking is taken, send

a confirmation email with maps and directions to properties if relevant. Ensure you capture visitors' contact details. This will enable you to contact people after the event, getting feedback and sending relevant literature according to the homes they visited.

If you are collecting personal data such as name, address, telephone number and e-mail address, you should be aware of the data protection laws (see Step 7 for more information).

How did they do it? – Hints and tips from other organisers

"The event was publicised via a banner hung outside Brighton station and a 28-page brochure printed on sustainably sourced paper using vegetable inks, which was distributed in local outlets. Twenty three articles about the event appeared in a variety of media, including The Observer newspaper, BBC Southern Counties Radio and even the New York Times and International Herald Tribune. The organisers learnt a lot about how best to publicise the event – finding the brochure the most useful method of advertising. In the future, they would launch such an event on a weekday in order to ensure even better press coverage."

Brighton & Hove Eco Open Houses report 2008

"Maximising the use of local e-mail networks is by far the more effective ways of reaching people – and far more time and cost effective than leaflets or posters. But it tends to only 'speak to the converted' so the visual materials are very important."

Oxfordshire Eco-homes Open Days step by step guide

Seven step guide to a successful event

Step 5. Volunteers

Start: 2–4 months before the event

Open home events take time to organise. The more that jobs can be shared out, the better. Volunteers can lend a hand before the event, working from your office or being given a specific task. However most help will be needed on the day itself, to welcome visitors and give support at each open house.



©Stroud Eco Renovation Open Homes

In the office: Stroud Eco Renovation Open Homes

What's in it for them?

Experience has shown that volunteers almost always have a positive learning experience at open homes events. They usually enjoy interactions with homeowners and visitors and volunteers feel part of an inherently positive community event. Many volunteers also have a personal interest in green issues, so it fits with their values and gives them an opportunity to further their knowledge.

Recruiting volunteers

You will likely already know of some people in your network or local community that would be happy to offer some help. Nevertheless, you will probably need new volunteers. Draw up role descriptions or advertisements, put them on your website and register them with the local volunteer bureau. Email circulars to local environmental networks or transition groups are a good bet, as many activists are used to supporting events on the ground. Local university environmental departments may also be a rich source

of willing volunteers looking to further their knowledge and their CV. Jobseekers will also use websites such as Environmentjob or Do-It to pick up interim short-term voluntary work in their local area. Finally, any press releases about your open homes event should always contain a specific request for volunteers.

Managing volunteers

Recruiting and managing volunteers is a specific job for one person on your steering group or staff team. As individuals come forward, they should be asked to complete a simple registration form to capture their contact details, availability, skills and interests. If volunteers cannot be involved immediately, ensure they are kept informed and invited to any induction meetings or launch events. Once they get involved, ask all volunteers to keep a note of their volunteer hours, as this is useful information for funders. And remember to thank them afterwards and get their feedback. They will hopefully be keen to stay involved.

How volunteers can help – organising the event

Someone with technical knowledge or a qualification in sustainable development could make the initial visits to homes, oversee technical information prepared for your website and write articles for the media or your newsletter. Office-based volunteers could work with information that homeowners provide, entering them into spreadsheets and preparing factsheets to hand out on the day. If you are taking bookings, this is another area where office-based volunteers can get involved, processing booking forms, taking telephone calls and sending confirmations.

Many newly qualified photographers are keen to be involved with community projects to improve their portfolios. Amateur or student film-makers may also be interested in making a documentary about the event, for fun or for a specific graduate project. It is important to ensure the relevant permissions are sought from anyone who is photographed or filmed, especially if you wish to use the photos or videos in the future.

Putting up posters and distributing leaflets can involve all members of your volunteer team, while collecting and analysing feedback forms is another post-event job for a volunteer.

How volunteers can help - on the day

In some areas, organisers have asked homeowners to essentially handle the day by themselves, perhaps with a little help from their friends, family or neighbours.

However, most organisers draw up a rota and aim to provide volunteers at each open home, to offer support and give themselves more of a presence on the day. For example, for drop-in sessions it's best to have at least two volunteers to welcome visitors, organise car parking (if relevant), give out handouts, point out features, answer questions, ask for donations and collect evaluation forms. Typically, one volunteer will stay on the door, while the other may stay inside the house with visitors.

In some cases, volunteers have also been involved in showing people around the property informally, or running short tours alongside the homeowner. For this, they will need some specific knowledge of the house in advance or some expertise on the technologies or materials featured. Working with partner environmental organisations may enable you to offer this support or you may seek to enlist it from professionals in the locality.

How did they do it? - Hints and tips from other organisers

"Volunteers, or stewards as we call them, are essential to the smooth running of our event. We charge £3 entrance fee, which stewards collect as visitors arrive. Stewards also hand out our booklets and membership leaflets and give a short introduction to CPRE before introducing the homeowner. They help give us a presence on the day and they really appreciate the opportunity to be involved in the event. It's not always easy to find enough people to cover the rota and we always underestimate the time this will take. However, having a number of energy assessors seeking CPD in recent years has helped enormously."

CPRE Norfolk, organisers of Green Buildings in Norfolk - Open Days

"Some house owners started asking us very early on if it would be possible for us to provide some volunteers to help out on the actual open day. As we weren't able to predict how many visitors we would attract it wasn't clear how much help was needed. In the end we decided that 4 presenters per house (including householders and volunteers) would be a good number. Most of the house owners asked friends and family members to come and help - but in some households external volunteers were crucial."

Oxfordshire Eco-homes Open Days step by step guide

Seven step guide to a successful event

Step 6. Opening up

Start: 1 month before the event

With the publicity out there and interest in the event spreading, now is the time to consider the opening days. You need to make final preparations to ensure homeowners have everything they need to enjoy the day and as many visitors as possible come away inspired and informed.



The Mayor of Brighton & Hove opening Brighton & Hove Eco Open Houses

Pack for homeowners

You can prepare an information pack for each home to use on the day. This could be delivered, collected, or given out at a briefing session for householders and volunteers. Some suggestion for contents:

- Information on energy efficiency grants
- Leaflets from trade professionals
- Information about the organisers
- Contacts for local environmental groups
- Feedback forms and pledge forms
- Incident report book
- Extra event brochures

Visitors will also appreciate simple information sheets on the home, with details of the different measures adopted and contact lists of local builders, suppliers and installers that were involved (this may already be on your website). You can also include banners, signs, posters or balloons, to be put up outside on the day. Any free gifts (such as low energy lightbulbs) that you or your sponsors want to make available to visitors should be supplied in advance.

Preparing the homes

The homeowner can also provide source material on the energy performance of the home and the work undertaken, for people to look at on the day. Examples could include:

- Fuel bills before and after work completed.
- Manuals and documentation for technologies
- Samples of sheep's wool or newspaper insulation.
- Architect's drawings or plans.

A laptop running a slideshow of photos, showing aspects of the house before, during and after installations, can help bring the process to life. Encourage the homeowners to set a table aside to put out the relevant literature for people to look at. It's also helpful to put labels up around the house to identify where work has been done or highlight interesting features.

Health and safety

Each homeowner should be asked to complete a simple risk assessment of the home, to minimise the likelihood of accident and to satisfy insurance requirements. The kind of risks faced might include loose wiring, trip hazards, low ceilings, uneven steps, slippery surfaces and dusty environments. Although risks will be minimal at most domestic properties, it is worth paying particular attention to those homes where retrofitting or building work is yet to be fully completed.

In all cases, risk assessments should highlight what action will be taken to minimise risk and who is responsible, with volunteers and visitors being made aware of any potential risks upon arrival. Any accidents or medical incidents should be noted down in an incident book on the day.

Risk management

Typically, open home events go smoothly. Nevertheless, it is worth reminding householders that they do have the right to refuse entry and should take every reasonable precaution to avoid theft or damage. Beforehand, neighbours should be informed and valuable possessions put away. Ensure that all

homeowners and volunteers involved in the event have a contact mobile phone number, to reach an organiser on the day. As an organiser, you may also consider asking local neighbourhood watch groups to keep an eye out. Although highly unusual, any trouble should be reported to the organisers immediately and noted in the incident book.

Conducting visits/tours

The unique value of open home events is in the personal exchange between visitor and homeowner in the place where energy saving work has been carried out. The honest, impartial experience of the homeowner is highly regarded by visitors seeking their own solutions. In hearing about what the homeowner has done successfully, the visitors gain confidence to do the same, as well finding contacts and practical information to know where to start. Exactly how the homeowner imparts their experience is best left for them to decide, but it is worth giving them a few pointers.

For example, encourage them to show people 'the nuts and bolts' of the property such as insulation, wiring connections, thermostats, pipework and water tanks – people will want to know the details. Ask them to talk about costs, grants, financial savings and payback times, as well as carbon savings – people will come with specific questions about all of these. Above all, visitors will want to know about the homeowner's experiences – what worked and what they would do differently in hindsight – so make sure this is at the heart of the event.

As the tours are taking place

Visitors should be in good hands, with homeowners and/or volunteers in place to meet guests and show them round, leaving you free to deal with the media, respond to any problems as they arise, and check in on tours as they are happening.

Although you probably won't be directly involved with running tours, do take part in some. It will help you to feel the benefit that others are receiving and to add to your own learning about the issues and the event as a whole. It will make all of your effort feel worthwhile.

How did they do it? - Hints and tips from other organisers

"The model that generally seemed to work best for the householders was to have a 'meeter and greeter' on the door who kept numbers of visitors and welcomed people in and invited them to wait and look at the displays and so forth. Typically people waited in the living room, but sometimes in the garden. In some cases visitors could walk around themselves – in which case the householder had made signs and information in each room. In most cases though the householder would take people around the on a tour house him/herself talking them through the features. At the end s/he would invite them to make a donation. During busy times a tour might be around 15 minutes and then immediately take the next waiting group."

Oxfordshire Eco-homes Open Days step by step guide

Homeowners advice for other homeowners

- "Work out the main points of information and write a script – you might not stick to it but it will give you something to fall back on when you are taking people round."
- "Have more detailed information available for the 'techies' who will know much more than you about efficiencies and payback periods etc"
- "Do not underestimate how exhausted you will feel at the end – make sure you have proper time to relax afterwards. Have dinner pre-prepared, so you can just collapse and look back on a great day."
- "Remember to talk to people about how it feels to live in an eco-house, as well as talking about the tech-y stuff."

Oxfordshire Eco-homes Open Days step by step guide

Seven step guide to a successful event

Step 7. Evaluation

Start: 1 month before the event

Evaluating the event, both with hard statistics and personal feedback from visitors and homeowners, is invaluable. It lets you know if all of your efforts have been worthwhile and will help you improve the event in future years, as well as giving evidence of success to your funders.

Evaluation methods

If you have a booking system in place, you will capture the contact details of visitors as they book. You can then send out an email to all visitors after the event to ask directly for feedback, or use an online survey tool such as SurveyMonkey. Over 50% of visitors have been shown to complete online evaluations sent out immediately after open eco-home events, and questionnaires can go into some detail. For drop-in events, you'll need to ask someone to keep a head count at each property, while also giving out simple feedback forms for visitors to complete on the day. Visitors are not as keen to complete forms on the day, but return rates can still be up to 35%.

Data protection

Evaluation forms, whether paper or online, should make clear to respondents how data will be used. For example, typically, data should be treated confidentially and used only by the organisers for the purposes of collecting information about the event. Feedback should be reported anonymously in reports (without names), unless permission is specifically sought. If you would like respondents to provide email addresses to add to your mailing lists, then include an option for this and make it clear that their contact details will not be passed to other organisations. Data should be secured safely and archived when required.

Evaluation data

Evaluations should ascertain visitor demographics (including age, gender, ethnicity, mobility status, professional status, type of house they live in), contact details (name, address, post code, email) and motivations for attending the event. Then, significantly, evaluation questions should aim to establish whether the event has led to an increased understanding of

energy efficiency issues amongst visitors and influenced them into taking action to reduce their own energy consumption. A variety of energy-saving solutions can be listed, with visitors asked to indicate which actions they might take in the future.

Feedback on the event itself is also useful, in order to establish how visitors heard about the open days, which elements of the visit were most useful and whether visitors think these kind of events are of benefit to people generally. All of this feedback can be really helpful for planning future events and for seeing what works.

Pledges

Some open eco-home events have asked visitors to make pledges about future actions, ranging from simple behaviour changes to installing technologies, adding insulation and replacing boilers. Visitors can pledge which measures they will act on and whether they are inspired to take action immediately, in one year or in three years, for example. Then, by using verified statistics (for example from The Energy Saving Trust) on how much each measure costs and how much carbon it saves in the average home, one can demonstrate the tonnes of carbon saved by the event and its financial value to the local economy. This is a very tangible way of linking a local event to national carbon targets, as well as measuring levels of interest in different energy-efficiency options.



The Mayor of Brighton & Hove with feedback for Brighton & Hove Eco Open Houses

Feedback from homeowners

Immediately after the event, give the homeowners a call to check how the visits went and get their initial impressions. Then write to them more formally, to thank them on behalf of everyone involved and send them a feedback form. Ask them how they found the day, what kind of visitors they talked to, whether they were happy with the support you provided and about their perception of the advertising and media coverage. Ask them what could have been improved and what advice they would give to other homeowners opening up for future events. Check also that they are happy for you to use their comments in reporting and future publicity.

Final reporting

Writing a report about the event, explaining what happened from start to finish, is very worthwhile. It should include a summary of evaluation statistics, direct feedback, costings and learning points. Reports should be sent to funders and sponsors to inform them of the success of the event and build a relationship for future years. Depending on your budget, it may also be worth organising a thank you meal or get-together for homeowners, volunteers, sponsors and partner organisations, to celebrate successes and thank people in person. Small gifts, like garden vouchers or book tokens, can also be a welcome gesture.

It doesn't stop there...

Open home events are popular year-on-year and many visitors will be keen to come again and learn more. Nevertheless, if you have the resources, think about how learning from the event can support your community all year round. For example, energy and technical data about the homes could be posted on a website for reference. You can then add data from other homeowners in the area throughout the year as new homes are identified or built.

Online blogs and forums are a valuable place to exchange information for those interested. A follow-up programme of trade fairs, talks and public displays can help maintain interest in the issues. Practical workshops on aspects of building design or retrofitting can equip people with the skills to make their own home improvements.

How did they do it? - Hints and tips from other organisers

"One of the best things about using a booking system is that you can track visitors through the whole process, making evaluation and analysis much easier. We already knew total numbers and which homes were most popular. To find out more about people's experience, we used an independent marketing agency to draw up an online web survey after the event. This was emailed to visitors directly after the event and a follow up web survey was done two years later to really establish whether visitors had stuck to their word and taken action in their own home. The results were extremely encouraging."

*CPRE Norfolk, organisers of Green Buildings in Norfolk
- Open Days*

"While organising and delivering our first event last September, it soon became clear that Bristol Green Doors needed to be about much more than just a weekend. People want information on retrofitting all year round and we have based our CIC on providing this service. Doing this makes our activity stronger and more sustainable. Maintaining our profile through more events during the year and our website will enable this to happen."

*Bristol Green Doors CIC, organisers of Bristol
Green Doors*

Local examples of events

Brighton & Hove Eco Open Houses (organised by Brighton & Hove City Council, Brighton Permaculture Trust and Low Carbon Trust)

Following a small bus tour of sustainable buildings in 2007, the Brighton and Hove Eco Open Houses event has been running annually since 2008. The first event ran over two weekends in early summer, with later events running alongside the Heritage Open Days in September. Typically, around 14 homes are open every year, with a mixture of older renovated properties and sustainable new homes featured. Visits are free and mostly on a drop-in basis, although some tours require booking. Volunteers from various environmental organisations in the city support the event on the day, with over 2500 people attending the event each year. Brighton and Hove Eco Open Houses won a National Energy Efficiency Award in 2008.

www.ecoopenhouses.org (2008 and 2010 event reports available online)

Bristol Green Doors (organised by Bristol Green Doors CIC)

Bristol Green Doors is a Community Interest Company that supports and promotes the retrofitting of existing houses in Bristol. In September 2010, it held its first open house event, with 52 real homes opening to showcase a range of energy efficiency measures and micro-renewable technologies. A variety of houses, flats, student accommodation, architect-designed and self-built properties were featured over one weekend, with over 2500 visits taking place on a drop-in basis. The homes were clustered in eleven neighbourhoods of Bristol, with advice hubs run by a range of neighbourhood and community groups providing information in various venues such as faith and community centres, shops and cafes. Visits were free and the event ran alongside the wider Bristol Doors Open Day event, as part of the Heritage Open Days.

www.bristolgreendoors.org (2010 report available online)

Cambridge Open Eco Houses (organised by Cambridge Carbon Footprint)

Cambridge Carbon Footprint (CCF) is a voluntary organisation that aims to help people work together creatively, to make real reductions in their CO₂ emissions. In June 2010, it organised the Cambridge Open Eco House event, opening up 16 homes in and around Cambridge. The homes were mostly refurbished dwellings, ranging from a listed Victorian terrace to a 1947 ex-council house and a three-storey Edwardian property. Homes were open from 11am to 4pm on two days (20 and 26 June) with booked half hour tours throughout the day. A launch event (an Eco-Renovation Question Time), served to increase publicity and featured a panel of experts answering questions chaired by the Leader of Cambridge City Council.

www.cambridgecarbonfootprint.org

Faringdon Eco-Trail (organised by the Faringdon Ecumenical Justice and Peace Group)

Started in 2008, Faringdon Ecoweek is a project aimed at moving Faringdon towards a smaller and more sustainable carbon footprint. Every year, during one week in June, hundreds of people enjoy a series of low-carbon events in the local area, from visits to hi-tech plasma waste facilities to tours of low-tech allotments. The Eco-Trail is part of the event, with 24 homes opening up for free drop-in visits during the week. The homes showcase a wide range of measures including renewable energy technologies, sedum roofs, woodburning stoves, rainwater butts, wormeries and a biodigester. Ecoweek was organised by the Ecumenical Justice and Peace Group in Faringdon and won the National Market Towns Award in 2009.

www.ecoweek.info

Green Buildings in Norfolk - Open Days (organised by CPRE Norfolk)

Started in September 2007 alongside the Heritage Open Days (HOD), this event has continued annually ever since and now operates in late September. Between 12 and 15 buildings are featured, mostly rural new build, with some public and commercial buildings also appearing. Straw cottages, cob studios, converted barns, water mills with hydro turbines, and earth-sheltered social housing, have all featured. Homeowners, architects and builders give in-depth tours and demonstrations for small groups lasting up to an hour. All tours are booked in advance and decoupling with HOD has allowed the charity to charge per tour on the day. The local Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre operate a telephone and online booking system for the event, which takes around 600 people per year. www.cprenorfolk.org.uk/opendays

Green Buildings in Suffolk - Open Days (organised by the Suffolk Green Buildings Network)

In 2009, Suffolk County Council launched the Creating the Greenest County (CGS) initiative to help deliver projects that respond to climate change and enhance the natural and historic environment. The Suffolk Green Buildings Network is a collaboration between the CGS partnership and the University Campus of Suffolk. In 2010, the Network successfully opened up 11 sustainable buildings for booked tours, as part of the Heritage Open Days. The event featured mostly non-domestic buildings, including a 16th century guildhall, new build and retrofit village halls, a brewery and the Waterfront Gallery at the University Campus. Visits to sustainable buildings and other green building events are organised by the Network throughout the year. www.greensuffolk.org

Llanidloes Open Eco Homes (organised by Llanidloes Energy Solutions)

Llanidloes Energy Solutions (LLES) is a community-based charity aiming to make Llanidloes one of the first carbon neutral towns in Wales. In May 2008 and February 2009, the charity arranged for nine energy saving homes in the Llanidloes area to open up for drop-in visits, with a £2 suggested donation on the day. A range of properties took part including a purpose built low energy house, a Victorian semi, an old stone farmhouse and a former country house converted into 7 dwellings. On each occasion, the event took place over a single day, with around 200-300 people attending in total. Further open home events are planned and the charity also runs a popular Green Fair every year with a street market, trade exhibitions, cookery demonstrations and speakers. www.lles.co.uk

Mendip Open Green Homes and Gardens (organised by Mendip Environment)

In 2009, as part of the Heritage Open Days, Mendip Environment worked with a number of other organisations to open up green homes and gardens in the local area, covering Mendip; Glastonbury, Frome and Wells; and villages and rural areas from Wedmore to Wanstrow. 27 homes which had been built sustainably or 'eco-renovated' were featured, including a low impact mobile eco-cabin, a straw bale home and a farmhouse with a wind turbine. Gardens demonstrated good practice in composting, food growing, rainwater harvesting and beekeeping. Channel 4's Grand Designs presenter Kevin McCloud helped with publicity for the event, visiting some of the properties and being quoted in the national press. Around 1500 people visited on a drop-in basis, with case studies and supply lists also available from the Mendip Environment website.

www.mendipenvironment.org.uk (2009 event report available)

Oxfordshire Eco-homes Open Days (organised by Oxfordshire ClimateXchange and the Climate Outreach Information Network (COIN))

Oxfordshire Eco-homes Open Days were jointly co-ordinated by COIN's Ecovation project and ClimateXchange, with the aim of supporting home-owners to eco-renovate their homes. In November 2007, the partnership organised its first open homes event, featuring a mixture of rural and urban-based homes in Oxfordshire. 18 eco-renovation projects were chosen, including a garden office, a former council house, a terraced Victorian house, a 17th century cottage in a conservation area, a listed Regency villa, and a 1980's developer house. The event then continued annually through to 2009 and ran alongside the Heritage Open Days, with around 800 people attending each year over four days. Visits were on a drop-in basis with a £2 donation per person suggested on the day. The Ecovation website still provides case studies of many of the houses that have taken part, while in 2010 and 2011, a rolling series of open home events was run by ClimateXchange.

www.ecovation.org.uk (2007, 2008, 2009 reports and Guide available online)

Presteigne and Knighton Open Eco Homes Event (organised by the Household Energy Service)

The Household Energy Service (HES) are an independent energy advice service working in Welsh and English towns and valleys around Bishop's Castle and Newtown. In July 2010, inspired by a visit to Brighton's event, the HES opened up 12 energy saving homes in the Presteigne and Knighton area of Mid Wales. Visits were free and a range of buildings were featured including farmhouse conversions, new build homes and ex-council house renovations. Biking and walking tours were advertised, alongside drop-in times, and accompanying exhibitions in the towns gave follow-up advice, home energy checks and product information. Future events are also planned to cover homes in Bishop's Castle, Clun and Montgomery. www.h-e-s.org

Transition Open Eco-House events (organised by Transition Town groups across England)

A Transition Initiative (which could be a town, village, university or island!) is a community-led response to the pressures of climate change, fossil fuel depletion and increasingly, economic contraction. As part of a range of activities, many Transition Towns have organised energy saving open home days or weekends to promote energy efficiency solutions to their local community. Schemes in Black Isle, Chesterfield, Leicester, Lewes, Southampton, Totnes, West Bridgford and Wolverton have showcased up to a dozen homes at one time, with the Stroud Eco Renovation Open Homes event opening up 24 homes for over 1000 visits in 2010. Together, the events have used a mixture of booked tours, drop-in times, cycle trails, minibus safaris and guided walks, supported by trade fairs, skills exchanges and public talks. A 60 foot off-grid narrowboat in Leicester, a co-housing community in Stroud, and a cob and thatch cottage in Totnes, are examples of some of the projects featured.

www.transitiontowns.org

www.stroudopenhomes.org.uk (2008 and 2009 event reports available online)

Victori Eco House Weekend (organised by the Victorian Terrace Energy Reduction Initiative)

Victori are a team of three environmental consultants based in North London specialising in energy advice and eco-renovation for older properties. In June 2010, the team persuaded eleven homeowners of Edwardian and Victorian houses in the Camden, Islington, Haringey and Hackney areas, to open up for visits. The homes exemplified the best in eco-renovation practice and techniques in London, including internal and external solid wall insulation, secondary glazing, water saving measures and new heating systems. Visitors were asked to buy a weekend pass in advance (costing £10 for homeowners and £20 for professionals) and over 250 visits took place over the weekend.

www.victori.co.uk

West Berkshire's Eco-Buildings Open Days (organised by the West Berkshire Green Exchange)

The Green Exchange is a network of sustainability groups in West Berkshire, holding regular meetings, workshops and events for members. In September 2010, as part of the Heritage Open Days, the network organised for seven energy saving homes and public buildings in West Berkshire and North Hampshire to open up for drop-in visits by donation. The buildings were mostly rural new build and included a cob-built eco-house, a teaching centre and a four bedroom zero carbon home. The visits also formed part of West Berkshire Council's Green Week and ran alongside a number of other green-themed events and activities by local groups, schools and voluntary organisations.

www.actionforall.org.uk/greenexchange

National examples of events

Old Home SuperHome Network (coordinated by the Sustainable Energy Academy)

The Sustainable Energy Academy (SEA) promotes education and action to reduce the carbon footprint of buildings and communities. They are currently spearheading Old Home SuperHome – a network of exemplar, old dwellings which have undergone an energy-efficiency retrofit and are accessible to the public. The homes have to demonstrate a 60% reduction in CO₂ emissions from improvements made to the building fabric and/or energy generation. Individual homes are open at different times of the year with events such as Heritage Open Days, Open House London and Wales Open Heritage Doors, provide a focus for openings. The SEA website also provides information on each of the homes, showing locations, features and technical information.

www.sustainable-energyacademy.org.uk (2007–10 report available online)

Open House London (organised by Open-City)

Open House London, the capital's largest architectural festival, takes place annually every September. It was first started in 1992 and now features over seven hundred buildings, neighbourhood walks, architects' talks and cycle tours. This free event focuses on all aspects of architecture but in more recent years, has included sustainability as one its core themes, with a number of zero and low carbon buildings open across the weekend. In 2010, visitors were able to use a web search facility to locate examples of 'green design' and Energy Saving Trust advisors were on hand at several open homes to provide more in-depth support on carbon reduction. The sustainable development network Sponge run low carbon trails of houses and studios, as part of the event.

www.openhouselondon.org.uk

www.spongenet.org

Heritage Open Days (nationally supported by English Heritage)

Heritage Open Days is England's biggest and most popular voluntary cultural event, with over 4,000 free events of historical, architectural or cultural interest taking part, and attracting around 1 million visitors every year. From 2007 onwards, Heritage Open Days has included many local energy saving open home events including those in Brighton, Bristol, Chesterfield, Mendip, Norfolk, Oxford, Stroud, Suffolk, Totnes and West Berkshire, with local groups benefiting from publicity and free insurance cover. As such, HODs has now added an 'Eco/Green living theme' symbol to its web directory to allow visitors to search for eco-home events in their area.

www.heritageopendays.org.uk

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Images used with permission from Brighton & Hove Eco Open Houses, Bristol Green Doors, Green Buildings in Norfolk – Open Days and Stroud Eco Renovation Open Homes events.

This Guide is dedicated to all those homeowners who have generously opened up their energy saving homes for visits, giving their knowledge, dedication and enthusiasm for the benefit of others.

About the Energy Saving Trust

The Energy Saving Trust is the UK's leading impartial organisation helping people save energy and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. We do this by providing expert insight and knowledge about energy saving, supporting people to take action and providing quality assurance for goods and services.

This guide was designed as part of an online toolkit for event organisers. Details of open home events across the country have been collated from published reports or personal communication with event organisers. Every attempt has been made to ensure that the information contained within this guide is accurate at the time of publication.

Further information on energy saving open homes, along with examples of templates, publicity material and evaluation resources used by groups, together with other guidance produced by Energy Saving Trust can be found at energysavingtrust.org.uk



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