

Getting the experts in

Organising a green open homes event is a significant undertaking, so getting experts on board at different stages can increase the chance of your event being a success.

There are a range of organisations that you could approach ...

Your local authority

Your local authority is an important potential partner or supporter, and can certainly lend credibility to your event. If it is already involved with an energy efficiency schemes in the area, then being able to promote these schemes at an open homes event is likely to encourage them to get them on board.

Some councils have funding streams to support community-based projects like yours, or they may be able to act as a supporting partner on other funding applications.

Your local authority may also be willing to lend its support when it comes to publicity, for example, helping you with press releases and using its media contacts to generate interest and boost visitor numbers to your event. Councils also have their own communications outlets, such as websites, newsletters and enews-bulletins.

If you do decide to engage your local authority, contact a relevant team/service area (e.g. the Sustainability Team), be clear about what you're hoping they can help you with, keep a note of who you speak with, and be positive and persistent!

Energy advice agencies

Energy advice agencies will usually be interested to hear about your green open homes event, and may be able to provide you with factsheets to give away, or displays to engage visitors. They may also have the capacity to provide an energy advisor on the day to give impartial advice to visitors on energy efficiency, renewables and so on.

Although it's unlikely that an energy advice agency will be able to fund your event directly (though there's no harm in asking), they may be able to

signpost you in the direction of potential grants or funding schemes, and possibly even check over any funding applications.

To find your local energy advice agency, contact your local authority or try searching online. The Community Energy Practitioners Forum – www.cepf.org.uk – is a national network of energy charities that might be able to provide support.

Building experts

Having experts like installers, builders or architects at your event is a great way to provide visitors with access to detailed technical advice and the chance to ask questions, especially about the more complex or expensive installations. This may even act as a ‘reality check’ if a visitor hasn’t properly thought through issues such as disruption or visual impact.

To find an expert, try contacting organisations such as the Association for Environmentally Conscious Buildings (www.aecb.net) which has a network of builders, architects and manufacturers who aim to share sustainable building best practice. But don’t forget to think locally as well.

Be aware, however, that visitors value open homes events because they can hear the story of how ‘someone like them’ installed solar panels or improved their home with solid wall insulation: they don’t want to feel like they are in a salesroom. Remember, it’s an ‘open’ home, not a ‘show’ home

Community groups

And finally, don’t underestimate how much help other community groups can be! There are numerous groups who have run open homes events up and down the country and some may even be local to your area. If there is an existing open homes event near to you then you might want to consider joining forces to extend the area you are covering.

The **Green Open Homes** network supports low carbon retrofit by promoting existing open homes events and helping new initiatives get going with resources, practical support and funding.

We’ve produced lots of other information sheets like this one covering legal and insurance issues, volunteers and marketing. See www.greenopenhomes.net

Additional web resources:

Use the following list of organisations to help you find details of builders, architects, product information and free factsheets on energy saving improvements.

British Board of Agrément (BBA)

Recognised throughout the building materials industry as a measure of quality control for manufacturer’s products
www.bbacerts.co.uk

The Building Centre

A provider of information on the built environment with a comprehensive online product directory
www.buildingcentre.co.uk

Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)

Information service, visitor centre and course provider
www.cat.org.uk

Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE)

The domestic energy advice section of CSE’s website
www.cse.org.uk/loveyourhome

Energy Saving Trust

Information provider, formerly government funded, also carries out field trial studies and runs national grant schemes | www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

The Federation of Master Builders (FMB)

The largest trade association in the UK building industry. Find affiliated builders or useful templates such as building contracts | www.fmb.org.uk

Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

Has a searchable list of affiliated chartered architects and can also answer questions non-traditional methods such as straw bale buildings | www.architecture.com

See also the following downloads from the Centre for Sustainable Energy’s PlanLoCaL website:

‘Establishing the right partnerships’

Gives advice on creating good partnerships with local authorities, local traders, energy companies, Green Deal Providers etc | <http://tinyurl.com/obvb64h>

‘Working with installers’

This resource advises on different models and approaches to take when working with local installers
<http://tinyurl.com/on9q4ms>