

MEADOWS OF HOPE AND INSPIRATION



The Meadows area of Nottingham is a mixed tenure, multi-racial area of the inner city. To the enduring dismay of the community, it has been best known for its poverty or crime. All this is about to change.

During March and April, the community will be installing the first 55 solar roofs on houses on the estate. These will be 'given' to low income families as part of a remarkable neighbourhood transformation. It began with the people forming their own energy services company (MOZES), and is the first stage of turning the area into a zero-carbon-energy zone. It will show how the shift towards a renewable energy future can begin from the poor, rather than leave them out in the cold.

It has taken the Meadows some three and a half years to reach this stage. We can now identify every south facing roof on the estate. Every school has contributed to the thinking about how the Meadows can

construct a more sustainable future for itself. It is fitting that the three local primary schools will be the first sites for solar installations.

MOZES is able to install the roofs for free because it has received a grant from DECC as a result of the transformation work it has already done. The community has agreed to a long-term partnership with British Gas, to introduce a range of renewable technologies that will pay for themselves over the 10-15 years of the energy partnership. It was this advance work that put the community in a position to guarantee that the roofs would be installed in a matter of months.

Under the deal, households will get to keep the 30% or more of the electricity they generate for themselves. Whilst this will automatically come off their electricity bill, the income from payments under the government's new Feed-in Tariff Scheme will all go back to MOZES. The community energy company will use this as a self-replenishing pot. It will pay for the installation of more and more renewable energy systems on people's homes and across the community as a whole.

At some point, it may also be part of the financing for the 330KW wind turbine, the community have planning permission for on the estate. The southern boundary of the Meadows estate nestles in the elbow of the River Trent as it winds its way around Nottingham. The university undertook detailed wind surveys for us to identify what the realistic choices were for locating a wind turbine. Two sites were in more affluent areas, on the other side of the river, and one on the Meadows side of the embankment. The most intriguing part of the local consultations about this was that it resulted in a reverse NIMBYism. People realised that if this was going to be a source of energy generation (and income) for them, then they better lay claim to it themselves. When the planning application went before the council it was for the Meadows site and had overwhelming community support. The only objections, about changes to the skyline, came from across the river.

Even before the DECC grant arrived, people in the Meadows had done a huge amount of work on their own low energy future. The community had set up a Green Loans Scheme, offering 0% interest loans for

specific energy saving measures in their own homes. The intention was to make a specific connection between the ways in which people can cut their energy bills - by improving the insulation of their own homes or changing to the use of low energy appliances - and the carbon savings that go hand in hand with these changes. It is an approach that sees the community tackling fuel poverty at the same time as lightening its carbon footprint on the planet.

Throughout the last three years, what this process has done is dispel the myth that the poor are not interested in climate change. The community itself has now become the main driver of the change agenda. Other agencies and institutions are having to play catch up. As soon as leaflets went round about the solar roofs, MOZES was buried in a flood tide of applications. The challenge is to keep up with the community's own hunger for change.

Of course, this isn't entirely ecological or altruistic. People in the Meadows are no better at describing what a tonne of carbon looks like, than you or I. But they can recognise a cheque when it drops through the letterbox. Open the conversation, however, and you'll find people talking to you about living more virtuously, rather than more profitably.

The key to the change agenda lies in the fact that it is the poor who have become the owners of the change process. Perhaps it has as much to do with power as it does with energy. What matters is that the people of the Meadows have become the drivers of change... and they love it.