

# Sustainable Thornbury

## Report on Energy-Smart Homes Trail

### 19-20 October 2013

## 1. Summary

This report describes the Energy-Smart Homes Trail, organised by Sustainable Thornbury in the Thornbury area in October 2013. Thornbury is a market town in South Gloucestershire.

14 properties in Thornbury and Alveston were opened to the public over the weekend of 19-20 October to demonstrate retrofitted energy saving measures. The event was supported by South Gloucestershire Council and the Energy Saving Trust. The 14 properties demonstrated a wide range of energy-saving measures, including solid wall and floor insulation, quadruple glazing, an air source heat pump and a heat-exchanging kitchen extractor. There was also a hub, where energy-saving advice was available.

There were 89 visits to the 14 properties and 43 visits to the hub over the two days of the event.

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## 2. Thornbury

Thornbury is a historical market town in South Gloucestershire, England near the River Severn, 12 miles north of Bristol. The population of Thornbury is about 13,000, living in about 6,000 households. The village of Alveston adjoins Thornbury, with a population of 3,000 in about 1,500 households.

While Thornbury has a small historic core, most of the dwellings in Thornbury and Alveston are houses built since about 1960, with cavity walls, double glazing and some loft insulation. Of the dwellings built before 1960, most are stone cottages of heritage value, and therefore difficult to insulate without affecting their appearance.

## 3. Sustainable Thornbury

Sustainable Thornbury (ST) is a community group based in the Thornbury area. The aim of the group is to make the Thornbury area more sustainable and resilient in the face of future climate change and world fossil fuel shortages. The group is interested in energy, food, waste, skills, the local economy and transport. It has experience of organising practical projects, events and campaigns on these topics, including:-

- Waste reuse events;
- A waste reuse website;
- Environment fairs;
- Skills workshops;
- A community supported agriculture scheme;
- Public film shows and talks;

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- A campaign for more local allotments;
- A self-help food growing group;
- Management of a community orchard.

Sustainable Thornbury has about 100 members, of whom about twenty are active, all volunteers. The group was formed in 2006. It meets monthly in Thornbury and has a website [www.sustainablethornbury.org](http://www.sustainablethornbury.org) giving more details of current and past activities. The group works with South Gloucestershire and Thornbury Town Councils, schools, the Chamber of Commerce and the local Camphill Community.

## 4. The Energy-Smart Homes Trail

The Energy-Smart Homes Trail was an open weekend for 13 homes and one community building in the Thornbury and Alveston area. The aim of the event was to demonstrate to local householders and community groups how others had retrofitted their properties to make them more energy efficient, and to encourage them to make similar improvements. Each open property had had improvements to save energy and save money.

The event was held on the weekend of Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th October from 12 noon to 6pm.

## 5. Event planning

A steering group of five ST members was set up in April 2013. This group met about monthly to plan and co-ordinate the event. All the members of the steering group had experience of organising ST events in the past. The following roles were divided between the members of the steering group:-

- Steward co-ordination
- Householder co-ordination
- Funding
- Website
- Publicity

A training session was organised in July 2013 for the steering group. The training was done by Bristol Green Doors. The training was also attended by two officers of South Gloucestershire Council.

Members of the steering group attended open door events in Bath and Bristol and the steward co-ordinator acted as a steward at a Bristol open doors event.

In addition to the steering group, about ten other ST members helped with organisation, including:-

- Designing and writing case studies
- Distributing leaflets
- Distributing posters
- Staffing publicity stalls
- Keeping accounts
- Photography
- Preparing and sending press releases
- Printing case studies and documents for householders and stewards

## 6. Partners

At an early stage, the steering group talked to Bristol Green Doors ([www.bristolgreendoors.org](http://www.bristolgreendoors.org)) and to South Gloucestershire Council.

Bristol Green Doors has been organising similar events for some years. They were keen to help other projects get started and had funding from the Energy Saving Trust (EST) to do so. They acted as mentors, giving one day's training to the ST steering group and officers of South Gloucestershire Council who would be involved and advice by telephone. They gave very valuable advice and example documents.

South Gloucestershire Council was considering setting up a South Gloucestershire-wide open doors project, and was keen for Sustainable Thornbury to run a pilot. The Council designed and printed much of the publicity material at their expense, and supported the project generally.

## 7. Funding

South Gloucestershire Council offered to pay for the design and printing of publicity leaflets and posters.

In July, ST became aware of the availability of small seed funding grants from the Energy Saving Trust (EST) under the Ready-for-Retrofit programme. ST was fortunate that their plans were sufficiently advanced to be able to set a budget, and that the planned event was within the EST timescale.

The extra funding would allow ST to insert leaflets in local parish magazines and produce banners. It would also allow a professional web designer to be employed. The budget drawn up was as follows:-

Website design and implementation		£700
Printing of parish magazine inserts	£500	
Display materials for hub	£200	
Printing of case studies	<u>£20</u>	
Total printing		£720
Production of banners		£250
Launch event	£50	
Training for volunteers and householders	<u>£50</u>	
Total room hire		£100
Volunteer expenses		£150
Insurance		<u>£200</u>
Total		£2,120

The actual spending, other than the design and printing of publicity leaflets funded by South Gloucestershire Council, was:

Website	£735
Printing misc	£365
Printing banners	£98
Room hire	£40
Insurance	£286
Other	£37
Total	£1673

## 8. Properties

Sustainable Thornbury (ST) needed to find about ten to fifteen suitable properties that the owner was willing to open. Articles were placed in local newspapers and parish magazines, and members of ST were asked to ask their local networks. Fourteen properties were offered by their owners, including one church hall. All the offered properties were the result of networking.

The fourteen properties could demonstrate the following features:-

- PV and thermal solar panels;
- Loft insulation
- Cavity and external solid wall insulation;
- Double, triple and quadruple glazing and shutters;
- Low energy lighting;
- Floor insulation;
- Insulated chimneys;
- Wood burning stoves;
- Air-source heat pump;

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- Heat exchanging kitchen extractor;
- Programmable radiator valves;
- Water management.

The features of each property are shown in the table below:-

Property	Features
1	PV solar panels, loft insulation, water management
2	PV solar panels, wood-burning stove, heat recovery ventilation
3	Re-cycled (plastic bottle) loft insulation, bamboo flooring, wood-burning stove
4	PV solar panels, cavity wall insulation, wood-burning stove, water management
5	PV and thermal solar panels, external solid wall insulation, floor insulation, insulated chimneys, wood burner, quadruple glazing, shutters
6	Community Hall. High quality double glazing, low energy lighting, water management
7	PV solar panels, air source heat pump, walls of structural insulation panels
8	PV solar panels, solid wall insulation
9	PV solar panels, cavity and solid wall insulation, high quality glazing, water management
10	PV solar panels, water management, low energy lighting, triple glazed windows, loft insulation
11	PV solar panels on both sides of roof, foam insulation on inside of roof
12	PV solar panels, wood-burning stove, water heating from PV, programmable radiator valves
13	PV solar panels, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation
14	PV solar panels, cavity wall insulation, wood-burning stove, loft insulation

The households were visited by members of ST to gather data for case studies and to take photographs. The householders were invited to a launch event on 31<sup>st</sup> August and to a briefing on 7<sup>th</sup> October. Case studies were prepared on each property and an outline description put on the website. A summary and photograph of each property were included in the map leaflet.

The role of the householder during the event would be to show visitors round the property and talk about what they had done, why they had done it and what they saw as the snags and benefits. The expectation was that visitors would be given tours round the property.

Householders were asked to choose when they would open and one of four tour regimes:-

- Visitors all required to book tours in advance;
- Tours every hour on the hour;
- Tours every half hour on the hour and half hour;
- Tours arranged when visitors arrived.

No householders asked for bookings in advance, so this potential facility was not included in the website. The website and map leaflets included the appropriate opening hours and tour regime as part of the description of the house.

## 9. Stewards

Householders were offered stewards to support the householders on the weekend of the event. Five properties where there were two or more householders did not take up this offer. Fifteen stewards were needed to support the other nine householders.

The role of the steward was to:-

- Admit and greet visitors;
- Ask visitors to sign in;
- Ask visitors to complete feedback forms after the tour;

- Show visitors out;
- Support the householder generally.

In addition five stewards organised and attended the hub. These could be contacted by the householders and were available to go to any households that needed more help.

Members of ST who were not householders were asked to act as stewards and ask their friends to act as stewards. One steward (who lived outside the Thornbury area) volunteered as a result of meeting ST members at a Bristol Green Doors event.

## 10. Publicity

A member of the steering group was explicitly responsible for publicity, but all members of the steering group and some other members of ST were involved in publicising the event. A publicity plan was drawn up and is attached as appendix A.

The following publicity materials were produced:

- 50 A4 posters, (for distribution to display sites around the town) by 4 weeks before the event;
- 500 postcards, (for the event launch and handing out at stalls) by 3 weeks before the event;
- 1500 A4 centrefold leaflets, folded to A5, (for the Alveston parish magazine) by the collation date of the magazine issue before the event;
- 500 A3 map leaflets, with details of the properties, folded to A5.
- 2 banners to put up in Thornbury in the fortnight before the event. These were attached to railings near the centre of Thornbury.

The Thornbury Magazine appears monthly and is distributed to every household in Thornbury. Several short articles appeared in the Thornbury parish magazine in the summer months, and a full page article and an A5 display advert in monochrome appeared in the October edition, three weeks prior to the event. The centrefold leaflets were inserted in the October Alveston parish magazine (The Helmet) and hence distributed to every household in Alveston 2 weeks before the event.

Press releases were sent to local newspapers and media. There was some advance coverage of the event in the local weekly newspaper, The Gazette, and a report afterwards. There was also coverage on the local news website MyThornbury.co.uk.

Postcards and leaflets were handed out at stalls at the Alveston Flower Show and in Thornbury town centre on two mornings (one Saturday and one farmers' market) in the fortnight before the event.

The publicity materials all referred to the website for details of the event. The A4 centrefold leaflets and the A3 map leaflets gave full details, sufficient for a visitor to attend the event. Leaflets distributed in September and the articles in the press and parish magazines all stated that the map leaflets would be available from the Town Hall and the town library from 1 October; very few (i.e. less than 20) of these map leaflets were taken.

## 11. Website

A dedicated website was set up to carry information about the event. The website address was [www.energysmarthomestrail.org.uk](http://www.energysmarthomestrail.org.uk). The website text was written by the members of ST, and the photographs were taken by members of ST. The website was designed by professional designer Jez Butler of Boum.co.uk, and set up using Wordpress so that ST members could maintain the content. The design used the graphics from the publicity leaflets to provide a consistent brand image.

The website went live a month before the event, and received 787 'hits' before and during the event.

The website contained:-

- An introduction to the event, how it would work and what it was for;
- Descriptions, addresses, photos and case notes of the properties;
- A map showing the locations of the properties;
- Printable copies of the event leaflets and posters;
- Links to sources of information about energy saving;
- A form to sign up for news of further similar events;
- A description of Sustainable Thornbury;

- Thanks to South Gloucestershire Council and the Energy Saving Trust for supporting the event.

There was also a Facebook page which gave news running up to the event, and referred to the website.

## 12. The Hub

A hub was set up on the days of the event in The Swan, a pub in Thornbury High Street. The purpose was to provide advice and information about the event and about energy saving generally. The venue was chosen because it was central, with plenty of passing pedestrians, and there was no cost.

The hub contained:-

- A visitor sign-in sheet;
- An energy advice stall, provided and staffed by Severn-Wye Energy Agency, arranged and funded by South Gloucestershire Council;
- A display about energy saving and the event;
- Leaflets about the event (including case notes) and about energy saving (provided by Severn-Wye Energy Agency);
- A stall about carbon footprinting, provided by Sustainable Thornbury;
- Volunteer members of Sustainable Thornbury acting as stewards, advising visitors how to get to the properties, how to find energy advice and responding to telephone calls from householders

Sustainable Thornbury volunteers handed out leaflets outside The Swan and invited passing pedestrians to visit the hub. This tactic produced a worthwhile number of visitors.

## 13. Attendance

Sign-in sheets were provided at all the properties and at the hub.

In total there were 89 visits to the 14 properties and 43 to the hub. The attendances at each property on each day are shown in the table below.

Property	Visits	
	Sat 19/10	Sun 20/10
1	8	0
2	3	5
3	Not open	0
4	3	2
5	10	9
6	1	Not open
7	5	Not open
8	Not open	8
9	1	1
10	1	5
11	0	3
12	12	6
13	2	0
14	4	0
Total	50	39
The hub	38	5

## 14. Feedback

Written feedback was requested from:-

- visitors to the properties on forms provided to householders;

- householders on forms provided to householders

Some verbal feedback was also noted, from visitors, householders and those who interacted with the stalls.

ST also held review meetings of the membership and the steering group after the event.

The feedback from visitors was mostly very positive, saying their visit had been helpful and informative. Some visitors seemed to visit homes to see specific features, others were looking for general money-saving and energy-saving measures. Several wanted to make changes in their own home.

A summary of the feedback is in Appendix B.

## 15. Conclusions

The general feeling of the review meetings was that we had hoped for more visitors. Our visitor numbers were a lot smaller than Bristol Green Doors, but given the size of Thornbury and Alveston it was probably over-optimistic to expect more. We have had hundreds of visitors to some other events we have run, but not all. It would appear that this event did not catch the local public imagination.

Some houses received very few or no visitors, which was disappointing for them. Most of these houses had few or no features beyond double glazing and loft and cavity wall insulation. We should have warned them more clearly that this was possible. We possibly had too many properties, but having so many ordinary properties demonstrated that ordinary households were involved, not just those obsessed with the topic. The community building was not open for long, but had only 1 visitor.

Some people said that the publicity could have been improved. We suspect that the name “Energy-Smart Homes Trail” was not sufficiently meaningful, but we struggled to find a good name. The advertising materials were eye-catching and colourful, but possibly it was not clear enough what the event was.

At the publicity stalls in Thornbury shopping centre, very few passers-by were interested. We have done many such stalls for previous events and campaigns, and the interest in this event was disappointing. Many dismissed the event as not relevant to them, as they had “already done it”.

Some householders and stewards who were involved for the whole weekend regretted being unable to visit all the properties.

## Appendix A: Publicity Plan

### Leaflets

We will produce the following leaflets:-

- A5 and/or postcard advance publicity ‘fliers’ for networking, handing out at stalls and in the street. These will be funded by South Gloucestershire Council;
- A3 folded leaflet with information and details of the homes for distribution nearer the event and at the event itself. These will be funded by South Gloucestershire Council;
- Case study leaflets for distribution at the event;
- A4 centrefold leaflets for insertion in parish magazines, which are delivered to every door in the urban areas;

Our partner South Gloucestershire Council has agreed to design all the leaflets and print all but the leaflets for the parish magazines at no charge to us.

### Press coverage

We will do a number of press releases for local press. In particular we will arrange for an article to be included in the Thornbury Parish Magazine (which is delivered to every door in the Thornbury urban area), possibly with a display advert, We will insert centrefold leaflets in 1500 Alveston parish magazines, which are delivered to every door in the Alveston urban area.

### Electronic media

We want to set up a dedicated, simple website with:-

- Information about the event, including household details and case studies;
- Why we are doing the event;
- A box to sign up for newsletters;
- A visit booking facility;

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- Links to advice and energy-saving information;
- Disclaimers;
- Thanks for partners, supporting organisations and funders;
- Future plans.

We will have a Facebook page, pointing to the website.

We already have pages with limited information on the Sustainable Thornbury website in the interim.

We will also have articles on local information websites, including My Thornbury.

We will send out electronic bulletins to those involved, Sustainable Thornbury members and anyone who signs up for it.

### **Posters, banners and placards**

We will put up A4 posters in the local library, public buildings and notice boards and local shops, at the homes and anywhere else we can.

We want to put up banners and roadside placards. We will seek Council permission for roadside advertising. We will also use banners at local stalls.

### **Display**

We will produce a display for use at stalls and at the hub on the event days. Sustainable Thornbury has some display boards.

### **Stalls**

We will have stalls at local events, with a display and banners, and leaflets to give out.

## **Appendix B: Feedback**

The following is a summary of feedback received, with comments by the committee.

### **Visitors**

We had 50 visitors on Saturday and 39 Sunday to homes and to the hub 38 Sat and 5 Sunday. Total 132 Of course some visitors visited several homes.

Some visitors seemed to visit homes to see specific features, others were looking for general money-saving and energy-saving measures. Several wanted to make changes in their own home.

Suggested by some visitors – we need to find out what they want to know about, and then provide that type of info and home with that feature.

### **Stewards**

Attention to detail is essential for smooth running.

Stewards were appreciated by householders and visitors.

By coincidence, properties with stewards were very quiet and those without were busy. Maybe all stewards should be flexible, moving to another home if needed.

Noticeable from feedback and visits that those with stewards who did not attend training did not have all resources on display.

All were on time and wore badges. For various reasons some did not wear uniform T-shirts.

All gave their time cheerfully. One was sick but this was not a problem as on-call stewards could cover and householder had no visitors.

### **Householders**

Very much appreciated by visitors, stewards and committee. Worked hard to prepare homes and put up displays etc. Naturally disappointed when no or few visitors arrived. Suggestions from some feedback that we should have fewer homes. Some suggested that all homes open just one day - same day for all. Homes open 10-5pm? Find those with really new or interesting features? Focus more on lifestyle for some? Maybe have several homes in close walking distance from the Hub, or small clusters of 3 or 4 in other places? Not too many homes with the same features? Have accurate info on map.

Noticeable that it was those householders not attending training or with no stewards who did not display everything needed – e.g. feedback sheets, balloons.



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Not all materials were ready in time for the training (i.e. extra posters, ST leaflets, hotbox instructions) so were given out later; therefore their use was not highlighted at training. Few posters were actually put up by householders.

### **Hub**

Successful as far as energy advice went. 38 visitors Sat only 5 Sunday. Some people then visited homes. Did we really promote the maps and explain in which homes certain features could be seen? Maybe need more staff in hub to do this as Tom and I were outside handing out cards and maps encouraging people to visit the Hub and homes. Possibly only open one day or 10am – 4pm so that people can go there first and then visit homes? Suggested by one householder that we open it on Friday before the weekend.

I think we should have had adapted feedback forms there, as so many visited. We could have found out more about what publicity had brought them there.

### **Publicity**

We advertised extensively but this was blamed by some for poor attendance. I am not sure that it is the main reason as an estimated third of the people offered information about the event said no thank you. We can however always improve on advertising. Need a coordinator just for this purpose – allowed to lead on this.

Need to look at visitor feedback to find out what worked best.

Thornbury Magazine. Good. Maybe having an insert would have helped but having one in the Helmet did not bring in lots of visitors for Alveston so maybe an article was best.

Churches - Gave out one poster to each Church – maybe could have given out lots of cards and more posters if they had been available on time. Was in Church notices but only 2 weeks plus requests for stewards and householders.

Gazette – several small news items but no photos.

Banners – Not up very early as not printed by S. Glos. Not in main site in town as drama group banner took up whole rail. With hindsight I think we should not have moved banner on Saturday to be in the hub grounds, as people may have thought the event was over.

### **Posters**

Did not appear to have enough printed. Later ones could have been put up around the town on sticks or posts as suggested; especially near to the open homes before and on the day. Householders or stewards could have helped with this if asked.

### **Cards and Maps**

Maps looked good but had several mistakes. Some street names not printed on map so maybe not found.

Gave out lots but was it too random. Should we have targeted more homes in the same areas as the open homes?

### **Web site**

Hard work put in by web designer and others. Google maps not reliable for directions to homes. Maybe some people did not find homes. Also on MyThornbury.