

## Open Eco-homes in Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire

### Summary of project/activity

SEACS Energy Ambassadors supported Open eco-homes projects in Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire during 2013. Open eco-homes is based on organising and promoting events where households who have made energy saving, renewable energy and environmental improvements agree to open their homes to visitors, usually on a specific day or over a weekend.



### Objectives of the project

- To inspire people who are considering energy and environmental improvements to their homes through being able to view homes that have already installed similar measures.
- To enable visitors to the open eco-homes to question the hosts in detail, therefore being able to make an informed decision about installing similar measures in their own homes.
- To provide visitors with independent specific information to compliment any information provided by sales representatives or from the Internet.
- To facilitate networking and links between the open eco-homes hosts.

### Methodology/approach

A member of Transition Town Dorchester, Sally Cook, organised an open eco-homes event in September 2012 and gave a presentation on the project at the SEACS partners meeting in Dorset in October 2012.

Community groups in Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire decided to hold open eco-homes events in 2013. A similar approach was used in the 3 counties, whereby community groups identified a number of host households who had already installed energy saving and environmental measures and were willing to open their homes. There were 20 open eco-homes in Devon, 19 in Dorset and 9 in Wiltshire.

A date for the open eco-homes event in each county was agreed with the households (allowing plenty of time for preparation, promotion, etc)

### Tools used, including those to reach target groups

A booking system was established which provided details of the features at each eco-home and allowed the hosts to specify if their house was open by pre-booking (for example groups of up to 6 people every hour) or if people could visit without booking.

A promotional brochure and web pages were produced in order to provide further information to visitors. In Wiltshire the best response came from leaflets distributed through the local newspaper -also promotional leaflets were delivered leaflets to all local estate agents.



## How was the project managed?

In Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire the Open Eco-homes project was managed and delivered by community groups, with funding provided directly by the respective local authority partners or through SEACS. The community groups were supported by SEACS Energy Ambassadors.

## Who were the project partners?

**Devon** -361 Energy, South West Devon Community Energy Partnership, Devon County Council and the Energy Saving Trust

**Wiltshire**- Wilton Community Land Trust and Wiltshire Council

**Dorset**- Transition Town Dorchester, Greendor, Transition Town Bridport, Communities Living Sustainably in Dorset, Dorset County Council.

## How was it financed and much did the project cost?

A significant part of the open eco-homes project in all 3 local authority areas was delivered by unpaid volunteers. The local authority partners or external funding including SEACS supported the cost of promotion and in some cases project admin.

## What were the lessons learned from the project?

This is a summary of the lessons learned across the 3 local authorities:

- A couple of high profile properties are useful (usually new build) for publicity, though they may be less relevant to what most people can do. Make sure to highlight the more everyday learning points in these properties. People may come to see the green roof, but it's a chance to flag up the LED lighting too.
- Household case studies are useful as handouts or for visitors to read on arrival (e.g. for pre-booked times when visitors arrive early before the previous group has left)
- Long lead in time required- be aware of this if there is a deadline for any grant expenditure
- In rural counties such as Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire people may have to travel further to visit each open eco-home. This issue was managed in Dorset by mainly selecting open eco-homes in 2 towns. However the high cost of heating in small villages off the gas grid is an important driver for energy saving, therefore rural eco-homes should

also be included. If funds are available, you could consider a shuttle bus to transport visitors around.

- In order to reach a wider audience, both Dorset and Wiltshire have piloted video filming some eco-homes (separately after the open eco-homes event)
- One year builds on the next. This is now already happening, with numerous community groups in Dorset, Wiltshire and Devon planning open eco-homes events in 2014.
- The 2013 events were very successful with over 800 visits in Dorset, 250 visits in Wiltshire and 500 visits in Devon. Two thirds of visitors were planning energy retrofitting in their own homes.
- Everyone really enjoyed the open eco-homes events- volunteers, home-owners and visitors. It created a lot of enthusiasm and momentum



## Contact for further information. Links to website information

**Dorset**- <http://greendor.wordpress.com/>

[www.transitiontownbridport.co.uk/Content/open.asp](http://www.transitiontownbridport.co.uk/Content/open.asp)

<http://www.clsdorset.org.uk/CLS-films.aspx>

**Devon** - [www.361greendoors.org/](http://www.361greendoors.org/)

<http://www.swdcep.org.uk/>

**Wiltshire**- <http://www.wiltshiregreendoors.org.uk/>

**National links –**

<http://www.greenopenhomes.net>

<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Organisation/Government-and-local-programmes/Community-energy/Energy-saving-open-homes>

Case Study:

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and Wiltshire

[www.seacs.info](http://www.seacs.info)