



GREEN
OPEN
HOMES

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Case studies 2013-14



Brief descriptions of 28 open homes events
held across England in 2013-14 and supported
by the Green Open Homes network





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Brickhill BEE (Bedfordshire)

Brickhill BEE Energy Efficient Homes

Number of homes opened:	8
Number of visitors:	60

The first ever Green Open Homes event in Bedfordshire took place on Sunday 26 January. The greatest interest was in the homes with air-source heat pumps, but even those homes with just solar PV panels saw local residents taking the chance to find out more.

Mark Fitzpatrick, Chair of the group said: "It was a really positive event, despite the weather. We got some useful feedback and many contacts from residents who want to be involved in our project to reduce Brickhill's carbon footprint".

The event took place in parallel to a 'Big Energy Saving Show' which concentrated on giving residents support on reducing their fuel costs. Energy advice was provided by the Bedford CAB, Bedford Borough Council and also a local Green Deal Advisor. Other local community groups ran children's activities and offered refreshments.

Mark said: "We held the event in January as part of the launch of our Brickhill BEE Group. It worked well, but would no doubt be easier when the weather is warmer. Another lesson for the future is to put more effort into providing more in-depth analysis of the energy data for each home".

Carbon Co-op

Eco-homes Greater Manchester

Number of homes opened:	27
Number of visitors:	334

During two weekends of open homes around Greater Manchester 27 householders showcased a range of improvements including external and internal wall insulation, solar panels, triple glazed windows and energy efficient heating systems.

As well as householders throwing open their doors to visitors, Carbon Co-op ran a series of bus tours calling in at specific properties and giving participants a chance to chat and exchange views on how they might go about adopting similar improvements.

"Thank you for this opportunity, the training has helped me understand the green energy industry and why it is important to make changes in the home. I really enjoyed volunteering, the home owners were very helpful. This experience will definitely help me further my career in the environmental sector"

(Luke Blazejewski, Volunteer)

Catalyst Mutual Enterprise CIC

Birmingham Catalyst Green Homes

Number of homes opened: **7**
Number of visitors: **142**

This was the first time that Catalyst Mutual Enterprise had run an open homes event and it was an exciting opportunity to build on the work they already do in Green Deal accreditation, energy advice training and energy advice outreach work.

The home openers were very knowledgeable about their properties and demonstrated the savings and benefits of the measures they had installed such as draught-proofing, solar thermal, wood burners, and solar PV including the potential for the feed-in tariff. The talks also included advice and tips on waste recycling, composting, water management and rainwater harvesting.

The home openers were able to answer all the questions posed by the keen visitors and on the whole visitors found the events very inspiring with many saying they would consider installing some of the measures in their own homes.

Cumbria Action for Sustainability

Cumbria Green Build on Tour

Number of homes opened: **34**
Number of visitors: **935**

During the spring of 2014, Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAfS) ran six Green Open Homes events. Being a large county with a sparse population, each of the events took place in one of the six local authority areas on a Saturday. This enabled CAfS to focus on specific areas to enable them to target a wider audience. The premeditated decision to hold the events on Saturdays enabled those who work during the week to attend, further attracting a larger audience.

The marketing plan for the event utilised a wide variety of activities to promote each of the events to a wide audience and engage those new to green building. Approaches included press releases to various relevant local press; ads in local press; inclusion in newsletters for local sustainability groups and professional organisations; neighbour invites given to householders; social media and use of the Facebook advertisements; attendance of external events to promote Cumbria Green Open Homes and mentions at many other meetings and events.

Energy Alton

Alton Green Open Homes

Number of homes opened:	12
Number of visitors:	152

The Energy Alton Green Open Homes day on Sunday 9 March was dry and bright in contrast to the wet Sunday the weekend before and it just shows that luck plays a part besides all that planning. The event organisers said *"We chose a Sunday and feel this was the right decision. Overall there was much more activity in the afternoon and next time we will be open for the afternoon and early evening and not the morning."*

One home was recently built to a high level of thermal efficiency with biomass boiler, underfloor heating, the latest heating controls, solar PV and solar thermal. This attracted a lot of interest. People want to know how houses of the future will operate as well as how to retrofit old houses.

"For groups thinking about it, just do it. There is really good support available and it will spread your influence and knowledge."

En-form

Colchester Green Homes

Number of homes opened:	19
Number of visitors:	316

The Colchester Green Homes event was held over every weekend throughout May, which proved to be a good decision as it allowed visitors to see more homes, created momentum for the event that built over the month and it allowed the development of mini clusters of open homes.

We had a 'Host and Volunteer Day' that consisted of a tour of the homes together with presentations about the day, a question and answer session and homemade refreshments. It was a great chance for all hosts to interact with each, share tips and provide a better quality of induction as it included an actual tour and presentation from a homeowner of what to expect.

Apart from making it an annual event we would look to extend the area to be Essex-wide with mini clusters and we now have the skills to enable other local groups to extend the project with our help and resources.

Exeter Community Energy

Exeter Community Energy Green Open Homes

Number of homes opened: **21**
Number of visitors: **145**

The homes that opened for our event gave us a really good geographical spread as well as providing a good balance of building and technology types. However, numbers within Exeter tended to be much better than in the surrounding areas, which may reflect our focus as an organisation and our supporter-base.

There were different arrangements for visiting each home and it seems that this had an effect on visitor numbers in each case. Homes where people were asked to book directly with the host tended to be poorly attended, drop-in homes were moderately well attended, and set tours tended to be well attended (except when outside of Exeter).

The biggest success was the organised tour of Montgomery School and two eco-homes where people got to see an inspirational public building, a new-build eco-home and a semi-detached home that had been retrofitted on a budget.

Although numbers were slightly disappointing, we have certainly had an impact in getting a significant number of people a step closer to making their own homes more energy efficient. Moreover, we have solidified and boosted our profile as an organisation and made some very important connections with key people and groups that will help us to make future events even better.

HadLOW Carbon Community

West Kent Open Homes

Number of homes opened: **10**
Number of visitors: **26**

The West Kent Open Homes happened on the 17 and 18 May and was the first time we had tried a specific open homes event, although we had run something fairly similar in 2010. We publicised the event through our local press and radio, as well as having some exposure on local what's on websites.

We used our own website to promote the event as well as Twitter, and other local organisations and hosts retweeted many of our posts. Interestingly hosts who tweeted received the most visitors on the day they were open.

Our information hub worked really well and if we ran another event in the future like this we would probably do a one day event centred around the information hub. Our tip would be to distribute your leaflets and posters earlier and try to get the local press to send a photographer to take some good pictures ahead of the event. Don't wait around to start your publicity and do more of everything!



Photos clockwise from top left: Support Aylesbury Vale Environment (SAVE); Transition Stroud; Hornbeam Environment Centre; Low Carbon Trust; Carbon Co-op; Exeter Community Energy

Lancaster Co-Housing

Lancaster & Morecombe Green Homes

Number of homes opened:	32
Number of visitors:	625

We have experience of running open tours of Lancaster Cohousing and tours for specialist groups such as academics and planners. We wanted to expand this to include as many other types of property as possible from the local area covering new build and renovation, with simple and more complex measures as examples of what can be done. We decided to run two weekends with tours of Lancaster Cohousing on the Saturday and other properties open on the Sunday.

The two most popular aspects of our events were the Energy Fair which brought nearly 200 people to the site of Lancaster Cohousing and meant that there were a significant number of people who visited the homes we opened. This was an effective approach and if we were to run Green Open Homes events again we would focus on interesting properties, with relevant messages, rather than trying to get a number of homes to open.

Low Carbon Hub

Oxfordshire Green Homes Network

Number of homes opened:	85
Number of visitors:	718

The Oxfordshire Green Homes Network held events in different parts of Oxfordshire in order to try and take a wider approach to running an open homes event. Running an event over such a large area meant that we need to carry out a strong publicity approach and as well as getting press into papers and doing multiple radio interviews we were also able to get an interview on the BBC Oxford news.

There were some significant barriers to overcome and recruiting homes proved quite tricky, partly because many volunteers of the Community Action Groups across Oxfordshire were also involved in the Art Weeks that run throughout May.

If you're thinking of running an event then consider developing clusters of homes which can definitely help for events in rural areas and make sure that you plan carefully to avoid any other local events, or if possible, work with them to combine your resources.

Low Carbon Lymm (Cheshire)

Lymm Green Trail

Number of homes opened: **18**
 Number of visitors: **120**

A wide variety of homes were included on the Lymm and Warrington Green Trail covering different house types, ages and locations (including off gas grid), and demonstrating a broad range of improvements. The Golden Gates Housing Trust (GGHT) tour visited examples of external wall insulation, flat-to-pitch roof conversions, large scale PV installations and wood pellet biomass heating as well as a visit to the GGHT training centre.

Our top tips for event organisers would be to encourage all the homes to open at the same times/days for drop-in visits and try to identify influential individuals in the community to help with promoting the event e.g. local councillors and community group leaders.

In the future, we will continue to develop the web based Green Trail and arrange home visits on an ad hoc basis. We are considering another open weekend next year and another tour of the GGHT properties especially new developments which are in the pipeline.

One visitor commented: *"The most positive aspect of doing this was that you are talking to real people who are not trying to sell you something, and being very distrustful of marketing of any kind, this really appealed to me. Another enjoyable aspect is being welcomed into lovely homes by lovely people"*

Low Carbon Trust

Worthing and Steyning Eco Open Homes

Number of homes opened: **19**
 Number of visitors: **1,088**

Eco Open Houses Worthing & Steyning took place in West Sussex over 2 weekends in April 2014.

We produced a full colour brochure and case studies for each house. 7,000 brochures were distributed around the local area! The event was covered extensively by local press and social media, following press launches in both towns prior to the events.

It was run in partnership with local groups Transition Town Worthing and Steyning 10:10, to share expertise and seed the event for future years.

45 Volunteers from the local areas helped out during the event, and want to do it again!

A 'green card' tea shop voucher was also incorporated into the event to increase publicity and engage local businesses - this worked particularly well in Steyning with its tea shop culture.

The event focused particularly on retrofitting and lifestyle changes to show what could be done in ordinary homes.

Marches Energy Agency

EcoHomes Open Week Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire

Number of homes opened: **9**
Number of visitors: **248**

A local event designed to save people money on their energy bills and make their homes warmer, has tripled the number of people getting involved in just its second year. Visitors were able to talk to householders, and in some cases architects and installers, about their experience of improving their homes and living in them.

A variety of houses were on display, demonstrating a range of different energy efficiency improvements. In one home the host had managed to cut their bills in half by spending £3,000 on a new boiler, cavity wall and loft insulation and some draught-proofing. But not all of them had finished their improvements, two homes were mid-refurbishment giving visitors an excellent opportunity to see exactly what goes into this type of renovation work.

One visitor commented: *"It was really useful to see a house where the owners had the confidence to make these improvements."*

Moor Sustainable

Esk Valley and Coast Green Open Homes

Number of homes opened: **10**
Number of visitors: **234**

The Esk Valley and Coast Green Open Homes weekend on 5 and 6 April proved a big success with many people visiting several of the homes and the pop-up cafe in East Barnby. Most of the visitors were local but we had a couple of visits from as far as London and Liverpool, and quite a few travelled some distance to see what energy saving technologies are being used in the Esk Valley area.

We had visits from a couple of Scarborough Borough Council Councillors who were supportive and who we hope to keep in contact with for future work on sustainability. A couple of local farmers were interested to see ground source heat pumps and a large scale log boiler on the two farms in our open weekend, as well as a heat recovery system taking heat from the warm milk in a milking parlour at Scaling Farm. The hosts had a busy weekend but had enjoyed spreading the message about green technologies and showing people what is possible in different types of houses.

Muswell Hill Sustainability Group

21st Century Homes

Number of homes opened: **8**
Number of visitors: **118**

The event held on 15 and 16 March 2014 was the third in a series of events organised by the Highgate Society and Muswell Hill Sustainability Group (MHSG) in the western part of the London Borough of Haringey.

The events consisted of a series of talks by experts and by homeowners on different aspects of sustainable house renovation, taking place at the same time and in the same place as an exhibition by trade suppliers and other sustainability groups. On the second day of the weekend up to 8 homes at different stages of renovation were opened to the public.

Combining open homes with talks and/or an exhibition over the same weekend works well and we've already recommended this to other groups interested in running open homes events. If you can form good partnerships with other sustainability organisations and residents associations then it will help maximise your coverage – make the most of these networks to get as many people along as possible.

North Dorset District Council

North Dorset Open Homes

Number of homes opened: **13**
Number of visitors: **55**

North Dorset District Council organised the first free Open Eco-Homes event in the area from Friday 16 to Sunday 18 May 2014. The Council also worked very closely with South Wiltshire Green Doors sharing experiences and knowledge which was invaluable – both events were happening at the weekend so we worked together to maximise the publicity.

Properties ranged from large detached buildings to community spaces and smaller terraced dwellings. The event also raised awareness of the properties in the District with local councillors who expressed their support for the initiative.

"All in all a very worthwhile & enjoyable day- where it was possible to glean useful knowledge based on the practical experience of green enthusiastic householders with no sales axe to grind."

[Visitor]

All of the participating properties were rewarded with a box of organic vegetables from local supplier Gold Hill Organics in Child Okeford and many have come back to say that they would participate in another event next year.

Nottingham Energy Partnership

Nottingham Green Doors

Number of homes opened: **4**

Number of visitors: **25**

In April we welcomed an enthusiastic group of local homeowners aboard our first Green Door Tour. The tour gave individuals the chance to see energy saving measures in real homes that are of a similar archetype to their own. Many of our visitors were invited as they currently live in cold, draughty solid brick properties and find it difficult to keep their home warm.

Our tours had limited space so we didn't need to do a great deal of publicity; they filled up fairly quickly following a letter to households who were already on our database and had showed an interest in solid wall insulation already.

If you can, drip feed information, do not bombard people. We had plenty of time on the minibus to do this – once at the house it meant there was plenty of time for the owner to talk from a different perspective. We also produced energy saving goody bags to give to each visitor in the hope that this would keep them thinking about the improvements that they had seen after the day was over.

A bit of a wow factor can help too, we were lucky that one of our open homes was recently featured in the Guardian's top 10 eco homes of 2014. These events have much more impact compared to having a stand at a community event.

Pewsey Vale Environmental Action Team

Pewsey Vale Green Open Doors

Number of homes opened: **10**

Number of visitors: **44**

We wanted to inspire people to take the leap and feel more confident if they were considering investing in renewable technologies. Giving them the chance to speak to other local people and view the technologies available to them first hand. Surprisingly, a lot of the people who attended our event were not from the village of Pewsey itself but from slightly further afield.

We would look at reaching more of the local residents in any future event, in addition to encouraging those from the surrounding area. The overwhelming response from visitors was that people found our event both useful and inspiring.

"I just wanted to thank you for a great enlightening weekend! We met so many lovely people and learnt loads too!"

[Visitor]

Regather Co-operative Ltd

Green Homes Sheffield

Number of homes opened: **17**

Number of visitors: **451**

Our open home season in Sheffield recruited and supported 17 homeowners who have made low carbon improvements to their homes, and enabled them to open their home to visitors, over 10 days in spring 2014.

Green Homes Sheffield's open homes events were enjoyed by attendees and hosts, who showed interest in taking part again. Feedback shows that attendees found the events informative and appreciated the host's generosity in passing on their knowledge. Hosts appreciated how "people found it interesting and useful to look at the work we've done, even though it is by no means complete or perfect in all respects!"

Attendees found it particularly useful seeing "practical examples of what could be done in a home just like our own". Postcard invitations to neighbours proved a good marketing strategy, and some felt the events are developing a community.

In the future we will consider more focus on the groups of open homes in specific neighbourhoods, working more with local community associations on publicity. We would also like to try out different types of event including skill-sharing sessions.

Support Aylesbury Vale Environment (SAVE)

SAVE Open Homes

Number of homes opened: **9**

Number of visitors: **30**

The SAVE Open Homes event offered a broad range of different housing types for visitors small and big; terraced and detached; old and new, an Eco-home Open Day had something for all!

Redfield House, one of the openers, is a unique large mansion with a range of technologies including solar PV and thermal, biomass boilers and a number of very green residents.

Robert Smart, one of the two more conventional openers living within the beautiful village of Thornborough, said of the planned event: "We had a broad range of very different homes throughout the Vale, opening their doors to visitors this year, including two in this village, so openers were able to offer relevant advice on reducing the size of heating bills, whether renewable energy remains a good investment or those who simply wanted to do something about their carbon footprint, there was something for everyone!"

The event has received some excellent feedback and we hope to get openers together for a BBQ this summer to plan the next event.

Sustainable Frome

Frome's Green Open Homes

Number of homes opened:	28
Number of visitors:	612

Frome Open Homes was organised by Frome Renewable Energy Co-op (FRECo) and took place on a beautiful sunny spring weekend, the 15 and 16 of March 2014. We also held a householder event three weeks before the open homes weekend which provided participants and volunteers with an opportunity to meet each other, ask questions, find out more about the Green Doors phone app and allay any fears.

On the day we also paid a professional photographer to take photos and a film maker to make a short film of the event – both of which have already been useful in promoting future events and showcasing our work. The main challenges were last minute changes to the program as a few homes dropped out and we did a mix of bookings and open houses which did cause a little bit of confusion as not everyone was aware that you didn't need to book for some homes.

Our advice would be to try and keep things simple – learn and adapt from others, use their sign in sheets, risk assessments, volunteer check-lists etc. Check if you need lots of volunteers as this is a lot of extra work and householders may be able to support themselves. Following up the event with energy fair is also a good way to prompt and support visitors in undertaking low carbon retrofit.

See photos from the Frome event overleaf

Thameswey Sustainable Communities

Surrey Green Homes

Number of homes opened:	21
Number of visitors:	116

The Surrey Green Homes event happened over one weekend of the 17 and 18 May and every home that opened used an online booking service so that they could manage the numbers of people who might want to visit. We conducted a larger leaflet campaign, delivering 21,000 to households and we also used social media to raise the profile of the event.

We were able to offer 20 free Green Deal assessment that were provided by Instagroup for visitors who completed a questionnaire, but it didn't seem like this was much of an incentive and in the future we would consider using vouchers that might be used for eco appliances.

Getting homeowners to take a more active role in promoting their home being open is definitely something that we would recommend. Relying on publicity from organisations such as local authorities isn't enough and getting the event out there through word of mouth would certainly help. Good quality photos of the homes that are opening will help your marketing material look professional and help with the promotion of your event.



Hornbeam Environment Centre

Waltham Forest Green Open Homes

Number of homes opened: **10**
Number of visitors: **400**

This was our first open homes event and we were inspired by the Green Open Homes competition and helped by taking advantage of the templates and guidance on the Green Open Homes website as well as getting support from Bristol Green Doors. We were thrilled with how many people wanted to take part by opening their homes and that we were also able to involve other venues – two cafes, a garden centre, a garden (complete with irrigation system made from bicycle tyre inner tubes) and a wall (a beautiful fan-design garden wall made with reclaimed bricks found at Trinity Buoy Wharf where the Lea meets the Thames)!

Hiring a local professional photographer meant we had a good set of photos for our publicity brochure, website and other promotional material and we now have a wonderful record of our open homes project which we can use to help secure funds next year. We were fortunate to have beautiful sunny weather for our event - great for demonstrating the home-made solar powered shower in one homeowner's conservatory! Visitors were extremely interested and enthusiastic, many making notes and asking lots of questions.

We also held some additional events that included photography exhibitions at two local cafes, a 'Meet the Experts' Q&A session and a 'Thank You & Evaluation Party' for our homeowners.

Transition Stroud

Stroud Green Homes

Number of homes opened: **27**
Number of visitors: **707**

The idea behind the weekend was to answer the questions – 'Why be Sustainable?' and 'What can we do to be Sustainable?' From simple solutions (for example, changing light bulbs) to more complex and expensive solutions (for example installing ground source heat pumps).

This is the sixth event of this kind organised by Transition Stroud and homes were open over the first Bank Holiday weekend in May to demonstrate and give advice about renewables and energy efficiency measures.

Many participants say they have been inspired to take energy efficiency measures and consider renewables in their own homes after the weekend. Some people, having visited before and made changes to their homes, visited again for further inspiration towards their next eco-renovation plans.

We had a record number of homes opening our event - from old, listed buildings to self-built wooden homes. Visitors were able to find something of interest to their own situation as well as being inspired by home owners who were ahead of them in sustainability.

Transition Town Loughborough

Loughborough Energy Efficient Homes

Number of homes opened:	7
Number of visitors:	37

The Loughborough Energy Efficient Homes event ran over the weekend of 17 and 18 May 2014. We had seven homes providing information to visitors on the weekend itself: three in Loughborough itself, one in the neighbouring village of Shepshed and three in nearby Woodhouse.

As this was the first time we had run an open homes event in Loughborough we didn't really have a feel for how well received the idea would be – it was rather nail biting in the few days leading up to the weekend. Home owners said that they enjoyed the event, although several commented that it was tiring and they were glad that they'd opted to just open for one day on the weekend rather than both. We had asked the home owners if they wanted us to provide volunteers to assist them on the day– some did and others were happy to use family and friends as “marshals”.

There's a good chance that Transition Loughborough will run similar open homes events in the future but we will need to work out how to fund such events sustainably. One of the nice aspects of this year's weekend was that there were no commercial “strings attached” - it was purely individual home owners talking to interested visitors about whatever measures they had implemented.

Transition Town Maidenhead

Transition Town Maidenhead Open Green Homes

Number of homes opened:	11
Number of visitors:	35

Our Green Open Homes event took place over two weekends in May. We also used the event to support a local charity, which is something we'd recommend to anyone thinking of running an open homes event. Our local press gave us good coverage and the charity also publicised the event on their website.

Despite all of our good publicity we are not convinced of the public appetite for “green advice”. Some of our visitors were just enjoying an afternoon out and not really interested in the information provided. The most popular homes were the “glamour” homes, one an award winning new-build eco-home, the other a beautiful 17th century barn with sympathetic green upgrades. The modest ordinary houses did not receive many visitors. If we do run it again we'd just do it over one weekend as the first weekend went well but the second struggled for numbers.

West Bridgford in Transition

Transition West Bridgford Open Homes

Number of homes opened:	7
Number of visitors:	59

Transition West Bridgford has run open homes events since 2010, but this year was the first time that we included thermal imaging displays as part of the event.

We take the pre-booking approach even though it almost certainly results in smaller numbers attending, but we feel it keeps numbers manageable for hosts and gives a better experience to visitors as they can have really good chat with the host if they are particularly interested in some aspect of the home. We have varied our marketing approach over the years and we tend to combine radio, local press and using the email networks that we've established as well as those of other organisations in the area. Next time we'll try social media. Most of our visitors to date have said that they don't bother with social media – so this could well attract a very different audience.

All visitors found the visits useful and inspiring, and although most already knew about eco-renovation beforehand they still learned something new. One interesting point was that many visitors this year were taking detailed notes to create or refine their own medium and low energy build/refurbishment plans.

Wilton Community Land Trust

South Wiltshire Green Doors

Number of homes opened:	14
Number of visitors:	184

Capitalising on the success of last year's inaugural Wilton Community Land Trust event, Green Open Homes funding was granted with a view to expanding this year's event to cover a larger geographical area. We stretched across the whole of South Wiltshire with most of the properties being in and around Salisbury.

In the run up to the event, we organised a Green Doors quiz to raise awareness which was well-attended. We had good media coverage locally and were listed on all relevant websites both local and national. Unfortunately we came up against two unforeseen circumstances which affected visitor numbers: the best weather of the year so far and extensive road works in and around Salisbury and Wilton.

It's easy to underestimate the time it takes to find the properties, visit the home owners and then do the case studies and risk assessments. The personal relationship is very important, in our view, and we certainly spent a lot of time making sure that everyone taking part was happy and felt 'in the loop'.

The time needed to be able to involve as many local businesses, schools, eateries etc as possible is greater than the time we had so it all comes down to timelines and when funding is actually made available.

