

# **Summary of practical actions identified in the Transition to Low Carbon Workshop, Winchester Discovery Centre 20-21 November 2009.**

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## **A community project needs:**

- 1. Capital**
- 2. A site**
- 3. People with (a) time (b) energy/commitment (c) sufficient skills**
- 4. Sources of knowledge and support**
- 5. A way to make decisions**
- 6. A legal structure**
- 7. Luck!**

## **Capital**

1. Capital investment from one rich person/family is the easiest (if you can do it)
2. Individuals will invest if they end up owning their own home (direct or self-build)
3. A government grant is obviously a great help but they are scarce, and more likely if you are in a deprived area with a need for job creation
4. Regional Development Agencies may be able to help e.g. with loans or feasibility studies
5. Energy bonds could work – selling them locally but also widely
6. in one case, the local credit union offered 0% loans
7. Selling shares in the same way as a “normal” business didn't seem (yet) to have worked for anyone.

## **Site**

1. It seems to work best when someone already owns the land
2. Or when the land is unattractive to developers (e.g. Bristol site was on concrete)
3. If you need to get planning permission, expect very long delays (15 years!)
4. Don't expect any help from local government – they are constrained by their own Local Plan/Local Development Framework, which means that if you want to do something innovative, by definition it won't be in it because the planners won't have thought of it

## People with time, energy, commitment and skills

1. People are attracted by clarity of vision; they want to do more than changing their light bulbs
2. No scheme will get off the ground without people with time and energy to spend on it
3. It is exhausting, and people drop out
4. involving local residents reduces opposition to anything that might be controversial e.g. wind turbines
5. You need people from the start who can find there way round bureaucracy (both Council and funders/banks)
6. It's worth paying for professional help, but you have to be careful not to disempower people
7. Get local politicians on your side. If you can, work out how your plans fit their stated ambitions – e.g. BedZed was in line with Sutton's Action Plan on the environment.
8. Don't try to do everything – for example, River Simple isn't raising capital from energy bonds.

## Sources of knowledge and support

1. There's a wealth of information out there on the web – but the problem is sifting it
2. It makes sense to join an umbrella body. As well as the Development Trusts Association, there's the Social Enterprise Coalition ([www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk)); The Ecological Land Co-op may help find land; and if it was a housing scheme, the National Housing Federation <http://www.housing.org.uk/>, Energy 4 All are looking to set up co-ops
3. It's worth paying for professional help
4. Other projects' failures are as important for learning as their successes.

## A way to make decisions

1. Involving all the stakeholders in decision-making increases ownership and commitment, but takes up a lot of time, can lead to delays in making decisions, leads to burn-out and drop-out
2. Not involving all the stakeholders risks concentrating power (or even perceptions of power) in the hands of a few, which leads to disillusion and drop-out or rows
3. Technical decisions may be better delegated to people with expertise than made by majority vote (e.g. what form of concrete) – the trick is knowing what's "technical" – does it include dealing with planning permission? The law?
4. if you don't make all the decisions at the start, you end up moving the goalposts (people sign up for one thing, then a decision is made to require something else that they didn't sign up for); but how can you make all the

decisions at the start when you don't know what's going to happen, and you've never done anything like it before?

## **A legal structure**

1. There are lots of legal structures available and will shortly be even more: private company, community-owned company, Industrial & Provident Society (co-op), company limited by guarantee, community interest company, charity
2. They could all be made to work
3. Whatever the formal structure, build into it something to represent and protect the interests of members against managers, and customers against shareholders – and something that ensures that considerations of climate change aren't downplayed.

## **Conclusion**

Robin Murray said:

- It doesn't matter which of these ideas you take up as long as you take up something.

We are creating prototypes. You don't have to get big – you just have to be copied.