



Oxfordshire Open Eco-houses

**Reflections on the UK's first
'Open Eco-houses Weekend'**

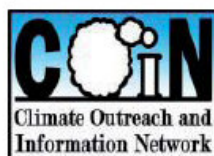
Oxfordshire, November 2007

*"...more next year please"
"...wonderful idea - very inspiring"
"... a fantastic way of learning"*

In the first event of its kind in the UK, over 600 people made some 1,200 visits to 18 houses across Oxfordshire.

The weekend featured a broad array of eco-renovated properties with a variety of features, from 17th Century cottages to 1980s developer houses, from a 1960s flat to a 2005 Straw bale office.

* Organised by COIN (www.coinet.org.uk) and ClimateXChange (www.climateX.org) in partnership with the Sustainable Energy Academy



and with the generous support of:

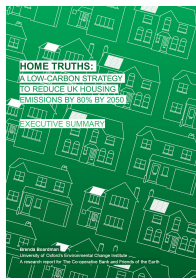


The concept

- Offering people the opportunity to see what Low and Zero carbon technologies could be applied to homes in Oxfordshire, and gain practical advice from the house owners.
- Increasing the network of Eco-renovators in Oxfordshire.
- Increasing the profile of home eco-renovations to demonstrate what is possible for individual home owners, and to stimulate the demand in Oxfordshire.



The background: Home Truths



Extracts from the Executive Summary of **Home Truths – a low carbon strategy to reduce UK House emissions by 80% by 2050**, by Brenda Boardman, University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute

'The scientific consensus is that for the UK to play its part in helping the world avoid a rise of more than 2 °C, we must reduce our carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. The household sector represents 27 per cent of our total emissions and achieving deep cuts here is an imperative.'

'Of the homes we will inhabit in 2050, around 80 per cent are already standing today and these have to be the main focus for carbon-reduction policies.'



What happened

18 house-holders across Oxfordshire opened up their homes to the public, The weekend attracted over 600 visitors, resulting in over 1,200 visits to houses.

The weekend was an overwhelming success that demonstrated a thirst for knowledge in this area, a clear market gap in the provision of eco-renovation advice and

contractors, and a need to support eco-renovators to share resources, contacts, materials and experiences.

What the house-holders said:

"I'm delighted that people came and were interested in the houses. It was very productive, I was pleased to participate, felt shattered afterwards, but fantastic to be part of the eco-houses camaraderie" Elaine Steane.

"Our house is a work in progress. 85 people came, it was great to see people were interested" Sally Harper

'We had 109 visitors over 5 hours. It was completely exhausting, very worthwhile and very inspiring' Gavin Killip

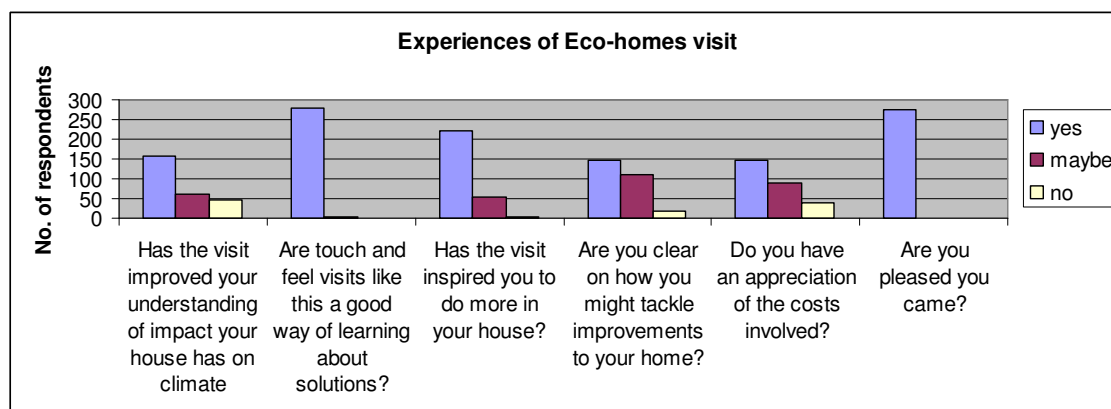
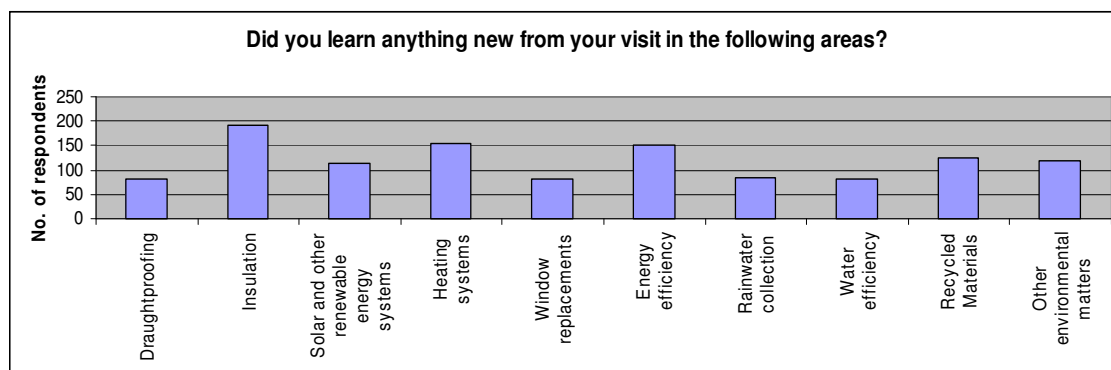


What the visitors learnt



225 of the visitors completed a survey about their experiences. Of these 84% were home owners; additionally people also came in their professional capacities as architects, craftsmen or local authority representatives. The top three take home messages were:

- intriguingly people learnt as much about the importance of insulation and energy efficiency as the newer, more aspirational Low and Zero Carbon (LZC) technologies.
- learning through experience is a great way of finding solutions
- the variety of houses meant that people could find something similar to their house.



What the visitors said:

- *“It shows there are things which can be done even without money: using an emergency, perhaps, to make eco-improvements”.*
- *“Very interesting, well informed, liked notices everywhere and leaflet give- aways”*
- *“More next year please”*
- *“Excellent - v. helpful”*
- *“Wonderful idea - very inspiring and valuable to get feedback from people who have done it“*
- *“A fantastic way of learning”*



What we learnt

The weekend demonstrated a clear interest in eco renovation, and the need for local information and experience sharing, with a third of the survey respondents saying that they would like to meet with others intending to eco-reno-vate their homes.

It also demonstrated a gap in the supply chain. Whilst there are many sources of information and advice, there seem to be no existing avenues for experience and information sharing between householders, nor of the need to match the increasing demand for eco-renovation in a proactive 'one stop shop' way.

Eco-renovation Social Learning

Bandura's Social Learning theory suggests that people learn through observing others' behaviour, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviours. Eco-renovation is a combination of behaviours and actions. Behaviours (e.g. switching lights off) can be significantly reinforced through one-off actions, such as insulating, or eco-renovating all or part of a house. Many eco-renovators say that their initial eco-renovation activities come about through a specific opportunity, e.g. moving house or replacing a bathroom. Given this opportunistic nature, it is important to provide access to a wide range of eco-renovation possibilities.

Follow up events to encourage experience-sharing can help ensure that, when the opportunity arises, people make the decision to eco-renovate or incorporate Low and Zero Carbon technology. As eco-renovation is increasingly aspirational, the opportunity for reproduction through modelling the behaviour to others (in future open days / informal events) is a consideration. Many of the eco-renovators who took part in the weekend mentioned that the weekend made them feel part of a 'club', an important motivator.

Steps to an Eco-houses Open Weekend

1. **Initial idea** – 'a weekend of eco-renovated houses open to the public in Oxfordshire'.
2. **Contacting** the eco-renovators we knew, getting a core group on board.
3. Securing **sponsorship** from local organisations.
4. **Details** – opening times, house details for publicity and case studies.
5. **Publicity design and printing** – a leaflet and poster, plus detailed website info.
6. Getting **volunteers** to help with the weekend.
7. **Publicity** – press releases, media interviews, distributing printed materials.
8. **Boxes of info** and materials for householders – including light-bulbs, further resources, books, and info about LZC technology. Householders also created their own displays.
9. **The weekend** – being on hand for support, documenting with photos and interviews.
10. **Evaluation** with eco-renovators to capture experiences and get suggestions for future events, compiling visitors' feedback forms.

What happens next

A matchmaking and 'talk to the suppliers' event to enable people interested in taking the next step in eco-renovation to meet each other and share experiences. We hope that the experiences of the weekend, and further networking activities can be rolled out nationally as part of a wider Open Eco-houses day / weekend. We are currently applying for further funding for creation of an Oxfordshire Eco-renovation Social Enterprise Network.

Like to know more?

Full information, plus materials to download, is available on www.ecovation.org.uk and www.climatex.org.

If you would like to run a similar event locally, please contact george@coinet.org.uk or jo@climatex.org / 01865 275 856.