



Community climate change action interviews

Somerset Wildlife Trust

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The **co-operative** membership 

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1. Introduction

Climate change is already happening. It is the most urgent and alarming problem facing people and planet. And yet sometimes it just seems as if everyone is waiting for everyone else to do something about it.

Fortunately, an increasing number of local people have decided not to wait any longer and are taking action at community level to combat climate change. This report presents the results of recent in depth interviews between Somerset Wildlife Trust and the representatives of ten local community climate action initiatives in Somerset.

It follows on from a broad based South West wide survey carried out by Friends of the Earth¹ last autumn. The interview questions were designed to build on the findings of that survey to reveal more details about the issues, problems and opportunities currently facing people involved in community climate change action.

The interviewees were selected for wide variation in terms of how long the community climate action initiative has been established and the size of the group. The aim was also to achieve a reasonable geographical spread.

We hope that the findings of the interviews will be of use to those who are looking to enable and empower communities taking action on climate change. And that the fascinating stories that are told through the interviews will be helpful to the communities themselves as a source of both learning and inspiration.

The report comes at a time when the community climate action groups in Somerset have recently agreed to work in closer collaboration and form a county level network. The results of the interviews will be of use in moving the new network forward.

2. Findings

The accounts of individual interviews are presented in the appendices. The following section draws out some of the key headlines.

Political action taken

- At least half of the groups interviewed had been set up to further practical action rather than to directly affect political change. The remainder are politically active.
- In spite of this the majority of groups have undertaken some type of activity aimed at influencing decision makers either directly or indirectly. This ranged from non violent street protest through to quiet diplomacy.
- A number of groups have close relations with local politicians, notably parish councils. Indeed, a number of group members have become local politicians themselves, which makes for a unique opportunity to influence from within.

Knowledge and support that would be useful in taking political action forward

- The most frequently mentioned need was for well informed, short, briefings on relevant issues, highlighting the opportunities to affect change.

¹ Friends of the Earth (October 2007) *A Movement of the people: Community climate change action in South West England*

- Some groups thought that other “of the shelf” materials that could be used to influence, such as leaflets and films, would be helpful.
- There was a clear message about the potential value of the county level network as a means of community groups coming together to have a stronger campaigning voice.
- One suggestion was to follow the UNICEF World Hunger Programme model whereby cells of activists are invited to hear or watch and interact with live broadcasts by key campaigners. They then write a letter or take some action before they go home.

Funding that has been secured

- The majority of groups interviewed have extremely limited funds and are reliant upon goodwill and financial contributions from members.
- Some have secured small grants to cover start up costs or particular projects but only a few groups have secured income of more than a few hundred pounds.
- The notable exception to this was Forum 21 which does attract larger sums of money through projects and commissions.
- Local authorities were the most frequently mentioned source of income, beyond the small contributions that members often make to cover the cost of hall hire etc.

Funding that is needed

- The funding needs that were reported were almost as diverse as the groups themselves. They tend to fall into one of two categories: Day to day running costs and specific climate action projects.
- Day to day running costs relate to hall hire, publicity, equipment purchase and training. Although some of the larger and longer established groups would like to be able to employ staff to help with administration or fundraising.
- Many groups have ambitious plans for future projects from green makeovers for village halls, though bike paths to setting up a Local Exchange Trading System.

Descriptions of group members

- One or two of the groups interviewed had a younger age profile but the majority comprised middle aged to old people.
- Hard to reach groups were not a particular feature. Except in the case of Forum 21 where an Energy Efficiency Campaign tackles fuel poverty and engages more deprived sections of the community.

Drawing new people in to the work of the group

- Interviewees mentioned a range of different ways that new people are drawn in to the work of their group.

- Making personal contact with people is clearly very important and events, talks, village grapevines and even the local media offer an avenue to achieve that.
- Several groups mentioned the value of “doing things” or live projects as a mechanism for drawing people in.
- Offering a variety of ways that people can get involved was an important consideration for a number of groups. Not everyone is willing or able to attend meetings.

Reaching out to persuade people in the wider community

- Here, too, there is a strong message that personal contact and conversations are very important.
- Interviewees also frequently mentioned the usefulness of events from green fairs, through environmental debates, to film shows.
- Taking out the message through the local media and delivering talks and workshops were also mentioned by a number of interviewees. Climate change action even finds its way into a church sermon or two!
- A number of groups have managed to cultivate good relations with various local media, although there were a couple of comments about the County Gazette seemingly being less receptive.

Main sources of expertise within the group or community

- Most groups seem to comprise a rich diversity of people with a wide range of skills and expertise to offer.
- Some groups have identified particular areas in which they would benefit from further training and information. These tended to fall into either the “technical” side of climate change action (such as the policy context and available technologies) or the “human relations” side (such as how to influence, running successful groups and fundraising).

Advising other groups

- Nearly all interviewees indicated that group members would be pleased to offer help and advice to others.

Particularly useful external sources of information or expertise

- Interviewees mentioned various websites, other groups and particularly influential individuals as useful sources of information and expertise.
- The most frequently mentioned external organisation was the Transition Network which has clearly been a significant influence.

Ideas about how the climate action community might work more effectively together

- Many interviewees commented on the potential advantages of networking at county level. These included: A more effective campaigning voice; sharing

ideas and intelligence; sharing skills and resources and meeting common training needs.

- There is enthusiasm for the network meeting in person and also for the creative use of IT for effective communication.
- One interviewee suggested a joint county-wide project to develop a travelling road show that would bring hands on climate friendly products and advice to each community
- There were some cautionary comments about networking and collaborative working, too - about the network needing to be able to cater for diversity and avoiding becoming an excessive travel generator and source of carbon emissions itself.

3. Recommendations

These interviews, which it was a privilege to be able to undertake, reveal just how much voluntary time and energy individuals and groups of people are devoting to climate change action.

More effort is needed, of course, in order to achieve the scale of change that is necessary in order to afford agency to politicians and to reduce per capita carbon emissions on the timescale that is necessary to avoid climate chaos.

The following preliminary recommendations are based upon the findings of the interviews and discussions with other community groups and representatives:

- **There is a need to develop the infrastructure available to support voluntary climate action.**
- **Targeted grant support (towards core costs and/or projects) could help to meet the needs of groups at different stages of development.**
- **There is scope to further identify and meet common training needs amongst the groups.**
- **The continued development of the county level network could help with much of the above. It has the potential to bring more influence, more negotiating power and more recognition.**
- **The development of the network could be helped through the creative use of IT, including an independent web space where groups can interact and share intelligence and experiences.**

Government is looking to local authorities to play a front line role in tackling climate change. It also expects them to shape places and empower citizens rather than simply act as a service provider.

Hence Local authorities could play a significant part in translating the above recommendations into action, helping to further unlock the power of communities to find their own enterprising solutions.

4. Thank you

We are most grateful to The Co-operative Group for kindly providing grant aid to support the interviews.

And we would like to offer special thanks to all of the interview participants for giving up their valuable time and for their willingness to tell their stories. Without their heroic efforts, and those of their fellow activists, there would be far less hope for the future.

*David Westbrook
Somerset Wildlife Trust
May 2008*

Appendix 1: Interview with Bicknoller Eco Team

Bicknoller Eco Team is a recently formed community sustainability group based on the village of Bicknoller in rural West Somerset. David Westbrook spoke to Mark Ogden

What political action has your group taken?

Our group was set up for grass roots action on climate change and other aspects of sustainability rather than take political action directly.

Having said this, one of the key figures in the group is the environment portfolio holder for the local Parish Council. And the local MP happens to live in the village!

The group is also closely linked to the larger Forum 21 group, which does speak up on behalf of the climate change community across West Somerset.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

Inputs from external professional experts can help make the group more effective and therefore a more influential example to others.

For example, Hilary Wright from the Carymoor Environment Trust ran an excellent session on “reduce, reuse and recycle”.

What funding has your group secured?

We have so far only looked for and secured small scale funding.

Individuals have kindly made contributions and the Parish Council sponsored the production of our local plastic carrier bag alternative - the “Bic Bag”.

What funding does your group need?

Our aim is to break even, or at least get close to break even, on day to day running costs.

A little more external funding would help with hall hire fees and the like.

We may be looking for larger amounts of funding in future for bigger projects. External funding could enable us to help other community climate action groups.

How would you describe your group members?

The make up of our group reflects that of the village. Around 60% are retired people in the age range 55 – 80+ years. The 80+ year old is the most energetic!

Group members come from a wide variety of backgrounds from business people, through charity work and campaigning to a local farmer.

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

Through the various events we have organised over the past year or so.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

The group has organised a number of public events since October 2007.

We began with the Great Bicknoller Environmental Debate and have followed up with some high quality local speakers.

Some events have attracted over 50 people, which is pretty good when you

consider that there are less than 200 in the village.

We have also engaged the local WI and other village groups, including the youth group.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

The varied backgrounds and experience of group members - especially the six people that make up the core of the group - means we have access to much "in house" expertise.

Would any of your "experts" consider advising other groups?

Yes. And if external funding were available we could be contracted to help other groups.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

The group is already well informed. For example, I am a long time Schumacher Society member and am also involved in the Magdalen Project (environmental education and sustainable living charity).

The expert local speakers, such as Hilary Wright and Wendy Stephenson, of Forum 21 and Envision have been very useful sources of learning.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

A community climate action network would be a good idea provided it adds value to local environmental action and helps make that action more widespread.

Appendix 2: Interview with Forum 21

Forum 21 is a long established voluntary sustainability group that covers the whole of West Somerset. David Westbrook spoke to Lorna Scott.

What political action has your group taken?

Forum 21 has no direct involvement in politics but does carry out lobbying activities.

And although not specifically set up as a campaign group we do also undertake campaigns from time to time.

We write letters to politicians and respond to national consultations, such as the recent one on new nuclear generation and the Energy White Paper.

We held banners, wrote letters and the like in support of a local wind farm proposal.

The group has always had good relations with West Somerset Council and has close links with independent councilors in the current administration.

However, becoming a member of the Local Strategic Partnership has been a key factor in terms of political influence.

We do have to think very carefully about positioning on any issue so as not to be accused of aligning with any particular political grouping.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

The one thing we do not need is any more information! The main issue for us is time to read and assimilate.

What would be useful is an information digest. Some means of sifting local and national information and presenting key points in a short, readable form - just a few lines with website links.

If a community climate action network can provide that it will be useful.

What funding has your group secured?

We have had several small grants from West Somerset Council over the years to help with administration costs so we have not needed to charge for membership.

We have secured small grants for specific projects. For example, to set up a new farmers' market and for a local transport guide.

These grants are typically in the region of £300 to £500 and come from sources such as the Community Chest.

West Somerset Council and the Local Strategic Partnership directly fund us to do things, too.

West Somerset Council funds our Energy Efficiency Campaign, which is now in its third year, to the tune of £3-4000 per year.

The Local Strategic Partnership provided nearly £20,000 for the production of West Somerset Community Climate Change Strategy and associated actions.

We are increasingly being invited to undertake commissioned work and have recently set up a Community Interest Company, Climate Action West, which is currently producing a carbon neutral strategy for the Exmoor National Park Authority.

The Community Interest Company is separate from Forum 21. It is important that we retain our voluntary arm, so that we can keep our strategic role; for example, as a member of the Local Strategic Partnership and the

Somerset Strategic Partnership
Environment Leaders' Group.

What funding does your group need?

We always need money!

We have never had the funds to pay anyone to do anything. We would have been more efficiently run with professionals, although that might have detracted from strength that comes with volunteer set up.

If we were able to pay wages we might get more young people on board. The Energy Efficiency Campaign, for example, has been able to attract mums to work part time.

We are currently working with Magna, who look after former council housing stock and also private estates on energy efficiency. Park homes are a particular target. At present it costs £30 per square metre for wall cladding Grant aid would help with that but there are no obvious sources lined up.

How would you describe your group members?

There is no paid membership - you become a member by getting your address added to our mailing list.

The majority of people attending meetings are older. Young families are not well represented.

There is no strong gender bias - perhaps a few more women than men.

And there are no ethnic minorities represented or people with a noticeable disability.

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

By doing things!

The variety of projects helps, too - it means we attract people with different interests. The farmers' market project draws in food interests, the timber re-

use project draws in waste interests and so on.

The Energy Efficiency Campaign tackles fuel poverty and in that way does engage hard to reach people. Some keen people have been attracted to the group through this route.

We have a 500 word monthly article in the local free News Trader newspaper.

Large events definitely draw in people, too, for example, when we showed the film, *An Inconvenient Truth*.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

As mentioned earlier the Energy Efficiency Campaign has been effective.

Many talks to local groups happen through the Energy Efficiency Campaign.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

The steering group and action groups that have been set up are good sources.

We can draw on the services of people skilled in a wide range of areas, such as, engineering, ecology, local foods, carbon markets and social enterprise.

Forum 21 was launched when the Greenpeace group folded. Hence there has been lots of internal expertise from beginning.

Would any of your "experts" consider advising other groups?

Would think people would be happy to help but there are time constraints.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

There are lots of useful email lists, including Friends of the Earth and Urban Forum. Satish Kumar - who visited as a speaker - the Transition movement and the film, *An Inconvenient Truth* have all been influential.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

We have mixed feelings about the community climate action network concept. The groups are very diverse. Some focus on local practical action and some are more strategic in approach. There may be limits to how effectively they can work together.

It is also evident that there are different views about how such a network would organise in terms of democracy and protocols.

However, there are useful potential benefits such as sharing information and lobbying. The County Council would take more notice if we spoke together with a stronger voice.

We are concerned that the network cannot just operate electronically and wonder whether a small organising group might be a good idea?

Appendix 3: Interview with Sustainable Frome

Sustainable Frome has been in existence for some time as a network for voluntary sustainability groups throughout the Frome area. David Westbrook spoke to Peter Macfadyen

What political action has your group taken?

It's all political!

We organise buses to the climate march, lobby around planning issues. We circulate an e-newsletter which promotes petitions and the like.

We have Green Party members in the network (we are a local network rather than a group) although we are strictly non-party political.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

We cannot be isolationist. We need to look out on the wider world as well as inwards on our own projects.

Networking with other groups would help - anything that becomes a larger voice.

Inspiring speakers can help move people to take action.

What funding has your group secured?

We collect £1 from people who attend meetings to cover hall hire (30 to 40 people attend each time).

We have secured small grants including from both the local Town Council and the County Council. And Mendip Council supported our "bring your own bag" scheme.

We have also attracted donations, including £200 to research fund raising opportunities.

A scheme we organised whereby people could sponsor a student to go on the climate march raised £300.

What funding does your group need?

More money and dedicated administrative support would help Sustainable Frome to tackle more projects, such as a lift sharing project and a LETS scheme. It could enable us to acquire or rent a much needed base with space.

How would you describe your group members?

The network comprises predominantly (but not exclusively) white, middle aged and middle class people. But we do work hard on this not being just about men in anoraks!

It is worth pointing out that Sustainable Frome has found that many traditional structures do not work here. There is no formal membership and we do not have a chairperson.

We opt for a more flexible structure, which might best be described as "gentle anarchy", with a group of self selected leaders and "elders".

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

Sustainable Frome meetings have poems, food and entertainment to appeal to as a wide a range of people as possible.

The meetings are run in different ways - not just talks. The next meeting will be run by a group of 14 to 17 year olds.

There is also a spirituality group which focuses on health and wellbeing.

It is not all about meetings. Some people do not come to meetings but still connect with our network in other ways.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

Word of mouth is the key means.

The annual Green Fair is also a big help in attracting around 1000 people.

We have had media coverage on FM radio Frome and through the local press - letters to the local paper have been a good way to generate interest.

Other ways of reaching people have included a street band and school assemblies.

We must reach out to other groups. We have to connect with people at an emotional and spiritual level. And we should not expect to win everyone over at once - a "drip, drip" approach is needed.

Be the Change and the *Change the Dream* workshops have been helpful in raising base level of awareness. 100 people have so far come to the workshops.

We are forming a Community Interest Company, which will also help us to reach more people.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

There is a considerable range of expertise represented within the network from architects to bio-fuel car converters.

Would any of your "experts" consider advising other groups?

Yes. We have particular experience of setting up successful workshops. And experience of setting up groups and networks.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

Chris Johnstone and Joanna Macey have been key influences.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

If we come together in an event we must avoid just talking. People need to come away with something concrete.

Working collectively we can offer each other mutual encouragement and might be better able to attract the best speakers and thinkers to pass on their advice.

We could make stronger approaches to County Council. There is definitely strength in numbers.

We need to find innovative ways of meeting and interacting that do not add to carbon emissions. We should investigate the use of modern IT technology to help with that.

Appendix 4: Interview with Transition Glastonbury

Transition Glastonbury has recently been established as the local response to the twin problems of peak oil and climate change. David Westbrook spoke to Linda Hull.

What political action has your group taken?

Transition Glastonbury, and its forerunner, Glastonbury Climate Action Now, have a track record of political activity.

Glastonbury Climate Action Now campaigned successfully for tetra pack recycling. Transition Glastonbury members took part in the national climate march last December.

Councillors are invited to meetings and I also became a local councillor last September - around the time of the successful Glastonbury United campaign which was about getting more people registered to vote and more engagement with local politics.

Transition Glastonbury hosted the recent County Council meeting for community climate action groups.

Transition Glastonbury also hosted a Transition conference for the whole of Somerset last month, which was opened by the chair of the County Council.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

A PR strategy would keep the issue alive in minds of local politicians and communicate the level of community climate activity that often goes unrecognised.

Sharing intelligence would also be a big help. We need clear briefings on issues and opportunities, including the timetable for action. There are lots of opportunities to influence through the Sustainable Communities Act, Local Government Act, Local development Frameworks and the Local Area Agreement.

One of the advantages of being part of the local council is that you get to hear about these things but there is still a need for clear information.

What funding has your group secured?

Not a lot! We are largely unfunded.

Donations of help in kind such as volunteer hours, use of the Town Hall and even the land for a physic garden really help. The garden is about health, wellbeing and community agriculture.

We do charge for attendance at some events. The recent Transition event brought £1000 in donations.

Mendip Council has awarded grants for projects, for example the local plastic carrier bag alternative - the "Glastonbury Bag" and a local food map.

What funding does your group need?

We need money for more projects but fund raising is a big job in itself.

Funding to support a fundraiser for even a short period of time would be a big help. Perhaps there are monies that can be tapped at District or County Council level that we are not even aware of right now?

We need to know who are our allies are amongst officers and members!

How would you describe your group members?

There is a good mix of sexes. The average age is around 35 to 40 years.

We also have some community elders amongst our number but we realise we need to connect more to youth.

Perhaps carnival clubs or the Youth Council would be good routes for reaching out?

We are also missing the 50 to 60 year old age groups. Perhaps developing links with WI will help there?

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

Make the most of live projects to draw people in.

We also give presentations to community groups and have a display stand.

For the future we think the Local Eyes website for community action offers promise.

In future we want to raise the profile at Ward and even neighborhood level. We intend to take a "street by street" approach - persuading existing members to contact people near where they live.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

The Energy Efficiency Partnership has definitely helped. We have 12 trained assessors.

Members speak to neighbours, friends and family and help them access grants for insulation and the like.

Big events help, too, such as the recent Transition conference.

We need to point to what other communities are doing to motivate this one. Many people like to know they are part of something bigger.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

We have a wide range of skills and experience - community development,

volunteer management, organisational development training, event management and web design.

People are often part of other networks, such as the members who run an energy Community interest Company.

We need more members who are influential people in their communities and people with skills in fund raising and political campaigning. An events organizer, a leaflet distributor, good communicators and sympathetic journalist would help, too.

We have had good support from individuals within Mendip Council but on the whole it could be more helpful.

Would any of your "experts" consider advising other groups?

Potentially, yes. I would want to ask them.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

We have gained useful knowledge through Transition network training and speakers and the Rob Hopkins blog.

We have learnt from other communities initiatives, such as those in Bristol, Milverton and Stroud and we have been inspired by the Forum 21's work for the District Climate Change strategy.

Local campaigns and events, such as Climate Friends, Rising to the Challenge and The Big Green gathering have helped galvanize support.

Links with local organisations, such as Mendip Council and Ecos Trust have been helpful, too.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action

community might work more effectively together?

Sharing methodology on the practical front could help us all. For example, we would like to know how Forum 21 managed to audit energy consumption in its area.

There must also be lots of scope for skill sharing, too.

One big advantage would be the ability to undertake co-ordinated lobbying. The network should have a PR strategy and seek to positively influence council members and officers by joining the dots between various overlapping policies and local government objectives.

We need real commitment from local authorities to seriously resource community climate action.

Appendix 5: Interview with Milverton Climate Challenge

Milverton Climate Challenge is based upon the village of Milverton in Taunton Deane. It was one of the first community groups set up specifically in response to climate change. David Westbrook spoke to Callie Gauntlett.

What political action has your group taken?

While some individual members are politically active the group has very deliberately avoided being seen as a pressure group.

The aim has always been about empowering people to reduce their carbon footprint and influencing other communities to do the same.

We have been very much about grass roots action but with the hope that this would filter up to decision makers. The government seems incapable of acting due to the lack of popularity of carbon cutting measures and there is a need to show them just what is possible.

In the final analysis, of course, people are political! The local MP was invited to an event. This was mainly to help publicise the event but the significance of what we were doing will not have been lost on him.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

This is a difficult question to answer as our future plans are uncertain. It has been difficult to maintain momentum after initially high levels of participation. Perhaps people feel they know what to do now and are no longer motivated to meet?

What funding has your group secured?

The group gave an initial presentation to the local Parish Council and was

then invited to submit a funding bid to them. They funded a showing of the film, *An Inconvenient Truth*.

In addition, Taunton Council Housing Department allocated £1500 to draw down as needed.

Money was also collected at meetings and various fund raising events have been undertaken, including discos and a book sale.

A decision was taken not to apply for other funds as this could get in the way of actually taking action.

What funding does your group need?

The list of potential projects is very long but the main priority is continuing to raise awareness. Between 3 and 4 events a year would be needed.

They must include interesting things for people to do and would require high standards of publicity and presentation. Each event would cost £200 to £250.

There is no doubt that projects are good for involving people. The carbon survey project we carried out, and which attracted a high level of participation, showed that. Ecos Trust photocopying the carbon survey forms was very useful help in kind.

Potential future projects include the installation of bike racks, greening public buildings, a community woodland, car pooling and safe bike paths.

How would you describe your group members?

The small initial core group of friends that got the group started were all male except for me. They varied in age between 20 and 45 years.

We came from a very diverse range of backgrounds, including a self employed alternative energy developer, a builder, a schools officer, market gardener, midwife, consultant anaesthetist, housewife, college lecturer, wood yard owner and a student doing a sustainability degree.

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

We started by organizing a film showing and an action weekend open to all.

The carbon survey was also effective at drawing people in - 20 volunteered as a result.

Other people got involved through specific projects. For example, our low energy light bulb project.

We had a couple of pages in the parish magazine but that did not attract new supporters.

Keeping momentum going amongst a diverse group of people has become an issue over time as members of the core group have moved on to other places and other things. People have been reluctant to take on responsibility for projects and activities.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

A key way is through big public meetings and the publicity surrounding them, such as posters, fliers and the use of the village grapevine.

We produce press releases which look interesting and work with established

media contacts. Take up from regional media has been good but interest from the local County Gazette has been disappointing.

A competition at the school attracted press interest.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

We had pretty much all the energy and expertise we needed amongst the original core group. There is more of a skills shortage now.

Would any of your “experts” consider advising other groups?

That is not really possible at present.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

The websites of relevant organisations, such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace have been helpful. As have some government websites, such as the Energy Saving Trust.

The Centre for Alternative Technology carbon gym tape has also been useful, as has the Transition movement materials.

Phoning various sources has been less productive - it can be difficult to get hold of people with sufficiently detailed knowledge.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

Groups have individual personalities and so any network must cater for diversity.

But there is certainly a need for more unified action. How about groups having a countywide year plan with, say, three joint actions a year? We can benefit from common resources such

as publicity materials. And better tap into national events.

Through coming together to work on concerted campaigns the overall

impact would be greater - we can get more organised politically - and the resources needed from each group would be less. Working together avoids small groups struggling to be viable.

Working together we should be able to meet common training needs, such as fund raising and facilitation skills to help maintain momentum within a group.

Appendix 6: Interview with Save It!

Save It! is a recently formed community climate action group based on the village of North Curry in Taunton Deane. David Westbrook spoke to Brian Jeanes.

What political action has your group taken?

We are a small group covering the village of North Curry. We never set out to be a political lobbying group - the idea was to help people take practical action.

We do feel we lack expertise in this area. We would like to do more to influence government but feel rather powerless.

At a local level we do have three members, including myself, on the local Parish Council.

We do feel we could easily put people off by talking climate change too much and prefer to bide our time and make a move when there is a serious opportunity to affect change.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

I had hoped to influence local building construction as a member of the Parish Council but find this is not something I am allowed to comment on.

Prior knowledge of the powers of councils would have been helpful as would a more thorough knowledge of the building regulations and planning rules governing the carbon footprint of buildings.

It would be great to influence local developers more directly. A leaflet that we or better still local planners could hand to them at pre-application stage would be great.

What funding has your group secured?

We had no external funding until recently, when the County Council grant aided us - to the tune of £280 - to audit local climate action contacts.

Committee members put in £15 a head to get the group off the ground.

At present none of our activities are expensive. People charged £1 a head to attend meetings and that covers basic costs.

We have a stock of low energy light bulbs bought in bulk and will make a profit when they are all sold.

What funding does your group need?

We are aiming to have a Transition movement speaker in future. We'll have to pay travel expenses etc and money to help with that sort of thing would be good.

Future projects could benefit from external funding. For example, we would like to organise a solar array on the village hall roof.

We would like more influence in the local school - it would be great if it could become an Eco School - but that is more a question of attitude and time than the availability of funding.

How would you describe your group members?

Generally 50 years old plus. People come by personal invitation so there may be an element of "like attracting

like". Also the older generation may have more time and inclination.

There are lots of people with young children in the village but so far we have not managed to engage them in a big way.

We suspect that people choose not to participate for a variety of reasons from being too busy, through to "head in the sand" preferring to ignore the issue.

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

Members of the group tend to be drawn from people who come to the meetings.

There is a tendency for the same people to come along and we would like to expand our attendance and the organising committee.

We have sent out a newsletter to everyone in the parish. And would like to circulate specific material on particular themes such as insulation, grants available etc

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

There is much emphasis here on personal contacts. We email individuals ahead of meetings.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

As a group we believe we are lacking in skills.

None-the-less, our members come from a range of backgrounds from physicists to teachers. They can contribute knowledge but their time is limited.

We are able to borrow a DVD player from a school and my daughter maintains the group website.

Would any of your "experts" consider advising other groups?

They would be happy to chat and pass on experience.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

The Milverton group was a good source of help and inspiration.

We have training needs around Grant availability and the Building Regulations.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

A community climate action network would enable sharing ideas for meetings. A list of accredited speakers would be helpful.

It would also enable common resources that could be shared between groups.

It could undertake cross county activism - running with the same campaign theme across the county for bigger impact.

Attracting publicity from local media, for example, the County Gazette has been hard work and might be made easier through the network.

Appendix 7: Interview with Pilton Green Group

Pilton Green Group is a community climate action group based upon the small village of Pilton in Mendip District. David Westbrook spoke to David Osborne, who is also Chair of the Diocese of Bath and Wells Environment Group.

What political action has your group taken?

Individuals do write to their MPs but the group was set up to have a more practical bias.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

More link ups with other like minded groups and activists.

More personal contacts with individual politicians would help. The County Council's willingness to collaborate with community climate action groups is encouraging.

It would be helpful to have access to briefing papers on key issues. Two sides of A4 of balanced information would be just right.

What funding has your group secured?

Our existence is rather hand to mouth when it comes to finance.

We all contribute towards hall hire for our monthly meetings. The shortfall is covered by the churches.

We are pleased that the Parish Council has allocated £1000 for green activities. We might have to access some of that fund which is going partly towards a prize for green projects within the parish, and partly as grants.

What funding does your group need?

We are planning a Green Fair in autumn for which we will need funding.

How would you describe your group members?

The group is open to anyone. The regulars are relatively small in number, with an average age around 60 years.

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

Core members of the group are attracted through one to one contacts. Meetings are widely advertised in the village.

Individuals will be approached to help organise the Green Fair.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

Personal conversations are very important.

We also reach people through articles in the local press. I write an occasional column in the local paper.

I am also able to use my position as local vicar to communicate about climate change - in responsible way of course!

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

We are a group of skilled amateurs. One member was chair of Mendip Strategic Partnership. Another was a professional vet.

The Diocese of Bath and Wells Environment Group, which I am also closely involved with, has a very wide range of expertise and links to other organisations. It was deliberately formed to be a network and there is much potential for links with community climate action groups.

Would any of your “experts” consider advising other groups?

We would gladly help.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

There have been a lot of useful sources.

The Schumacher Institute was especially helpful, as was Ian Roderick of the Chew Magna Go Zero Project.

Material produced for the Eco Congregations initiative and Operation Noah has been useful.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

Twice yearly meeting of community climate action groups would be a great idea.

The Internet should be useful, although I am not keen on chat rooms.

There is a need to consider how the network is to engage with countywide organisations. There may be a need for some kind of environment federation. It should include other groups, such as the WI, and not just greens.

Appendix 8: Interview with Towards a Sustainable Shapwick

Towards a Sustainable Shapwick is a recently formed community climate action group centred on the village of Shapwick in the heart of the Somerset Levels and Moors. David Westbrook spoke to Mike Beale

What political action has your group taken?

Individuals take political action but we have not done so as a group.

As a group we are considering approaching local business about reducing packaging.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

We are not inclined towards marches and protests. We prefer to go for one to one contacts with individual decision makers.

What we need are accurate facts upon which to base rational and unemotional advocacy.

What funding has your group secured?

We have made a couple of approaches to potential funding bodies but have not secured any funding so far.

We need to be constituted to access many grants and there is a reluctance to take that step.

We do wish to avoid charging for meetings if we can. The help in kind that the local school provides for advertising is welcome.

What funding does your group need?

It would be good to have some money in the coffers!

Financial support for training in energy assessment and for future projects would both be helpful.

How would you describe your group members?

They are a mixture of retired people and folks in full time work and could probably be described as "middle class".

The age range is around mid 30's to mid 70's

We have some non committee oriented people amongst our number.

Some group members have links with the nearby Wedmore Green Group.

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

One to one contacts are very important and we also reach people through articles in the local Shapwick News.

People are also drawn in through events, such as the recent Green Fair we organised. And we also put on a stand at the village fete.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

The Green Fair and one to one contacts have been most successful. Acting as a champion and avoiding the doom and gloom scenario are key.

We tried outreach at farmers market in Chilton Polden but that was not successful.

A community climate action network could also help with the set up of new groups.

And could also have a role in bringing important issues to local attention - succinct briefings on key issues would help.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

We are already well organised and always seem to find someone with the skills we need.

Would any of your “experts” consider advising other groups?

Yes - we have already helped a community group in Berrow that is aiming to organise a Green Fair.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

A range of websites - such as Climate Space - have been useful as have organisations such as Ecos Trust, Energy Saving Trust and Friends of the Earth.

We have also learnt from Transition and other green events, such as the Co-operative event at the Genesis Centre.

We have produced a green directory for our area to provide information to others.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

There is much potential for beneficial networking through the web.

The Highbridge and Burnham in Transition site is a good model for website design. It must be user friendly, make local and national links and keep live.

Appendix 9: Interview with South Somerset Climate Action

South Somerset Climate Action is centred on the town of Ilminster. It is amongst the longer established community climate action groups. David Westbrook spoke to Joe Burlington.

What political action has your group taken?

I have been involved in personal political action going back many years. Political action is one of the features of our group.

We organised an environmental hustings ahead of the last general election, hosted leading national politicians and invite local politicians when relevant speakers are in town. We find that politicians want to be associated with the group.

We have made inputs to the development of the Ilminster Town Plan and I have also been appointed to the Board of the South Somerset Local Strategic Partnership and Environment Leaders Group of Somerset Strategic Partnership.

The latter recently held a workshop to inform the Local Area Agreement and Sustainable Community Strategy. The approach of some of the council officers exemplified the difficulties of breaking the “gravitational attraction” that draws many people back to business-as-usual rather than new solutions.

We are undeterred, though, and our group has moved individuals to write campaigning letters through our programme of talks to groups, such as the WI.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

Clear concise policy briefings would be a useful tool.

Local groups are not always aware of policies and law and how these could be used, for example, in the areas of planning policy or the powers of local authorities to make by laws without reference to central government.

Campaigning events that we can join in with could also help, along the lines of Earth Hour or the Greenpeace campaign to prevent the development of the Kingsnorth power station.

“Off the shelf” materials would be useful, too. For example, advocacy leaflets (but not the, energy intensive, glossy colour types), a version of *Be the Change* for an English audience or a shortened version of the film, *Message in the Waves*.

With access to suitable editing facilities I could produce the latter myself!

What funding has your group secured?

We make a small charge to individuals to cover costs of hall hire etc.

We also make a small income from book sales and a “bring own bag” day.

We have secured small grants up to £190 and individual donations up to £200.

What funding does your group need?

Our income covers the ongoing costs of running the group.

There are technical and equipment needs such as a data projector, and computer software.

Funding for an administrative officer would really help.

How would you describe your group members?

They are predominantly retired. Financial pressures are thought to inhibit a wider membership.

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

As mentioned earlier we give talks, including to schools.

There is also a local "Women in Transition" group that meets regularly for tea, cake and exchange ideas.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

Big events are the major means we have used to draw people in.

The films we have shown at the Warehouse Theatre have been accompanied by large banners across the High Street.

We send regular email updates, printing alternate editions on paper for non web connected people.

Reaching out is difficult. People are generally not motivated to do other than going on doing what we are doing. They are not excited by politics with so little to choose between the politicians.

The group covers South Somerset but there is a bias towards Ilminster.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

Peter Lansdown checks national daily newspapers - Guardian and Independent - and forwards relevant email "cuttings" to a number of us.

Would any of your "experts" consider advising other groups?

We would be happy to help if we can.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

Ecos Trust is a great source of advice, for example, on making houses less carbon dependant.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

A community climate action network would have advantages in terms of communication with decision makers.

There is great potential in following the model of the RESULTS whereby cells of activists are invited to join monthly conference calls with expert speakers or key campaigners. They then discuss a well produced brief and write a letter to newspapers or politicians or take some other immediate action before they go home.

Face to face meetings can be immensely valuable but we must, of course, avoid travelling to too many meetings and adding to our collective carbon footprint.

Appendix 10: Interview with Westbury Sub Mendip community

Westbury Sub Mendip is located on the Mendip Hills. There is not yet a formal community climate action group but there are people who act individually and on collective projects. David Westbrook spoke to Andrew Buchanan and Malcolm Mogford

What political action has your group taken?

We have not yet taken any political action.

What knowledge and support would be useful in taking political action forward?

That is not yet clear.

What funding has your group secured?

We have not yet secured any funding.

What funding does your group need?

Funding is not the main issue. There are a small number of movers and shakers at the hub of community action in the village. They lack time because they are involved in so many competing activities.

How would you describe your group members?

Not really a group as yet but rather a collection of individuals who take action individually or on collective projects on an ad hoc basis.

It is not unusual to get 30 to 40 people taking part in a wildlife survey or conservation activity like putting up nest boxes.

The potential is there for a community climate action group.

How do you draw new people in to the work of the group?

Having a focal point clearly helps to get people mobilised.

The local nest box project is facilitated by Hawk and Owl Trust. Bird surveys happen because individuals are members of bird organisations and draw in other people to help. Many people are involved in local dry stone wall project run by the Mendip AONB service.

Perhaps climate action needs a similar focal point to help get people started.

How do you reach out *beyond the group* to persuade people in the wider community to take action on climate change?

As described earlier there is no formal group of enthusiasts as yet to reach out more widely.

What are the main sources of expertise you can draw on from within your group or community?

There is technical expertise amongst our number. Local people have investigated the feasibility of wind and hydro power.

Training workshops run locally but with the benefit of additional outside expertise could help.

Would any of your “experts” consider advising other groups?

That might be a long term aim but too early at present.

Are there any external sources of information or expertise that you have found particularly useful?

Again rather too early days but we can say that we would benefit from dispassionate advice on the real costs and real financial and carbon savings associated with different technologies

to inform our future actions and advice.

Do you have any ideas about how the community climate action community might work more effectively together?

We can see the benefits of a community climate action network in making connections, for example, between beginners and more experienced groups.

It will be important to make sure that a network actually achieves something concrete and that it does not have too many meetings.

A travelling road show with demonstration climate friendly products and experts on hand - perhaps hosted by each community climate action group around the county - would help show people how they can make a difference.