

TRANSFORMING PROGRESS TOWARDS NET ZERO HOMES IN CHARLBURY (AND BEYOND)

Amount of grant sought	Initial est. £21,000
Project start date	September 2022
Project end date	March 2023

Background

A key component of mitigating and adapting to climate change is to improve radically the energy and carbon performance of the UK's homes. This is identified as a strategic objective both nationally and locally (in Charlbury Town Council's strategic plan). Delivering on the objective is severely hampered by a variety of issues:

- A lack of energy and carbon literacy on the part of residents. This has the effect of increasing their energy bills unnecessarily and also means that they are not able to act as an informed client when commissioning works for home improvement from the traditional buildings industry.
- There is a lack of skills and expertise on the part of the traditional buildings industry. It is also ageing and largely untrained in the techniques required to deliver improved energy and carbon performance
- The planning system remains ill-equipped to help deliver the required transformation. It continues to depend on the nationally-developed regulatory framework which is likely to mean that planners have not been challenged to understand the implications for energy and carbon performance of decisions they make in relation to new homes and refurbishments.

There is also an ecological emergency which means that a new decision-making framework is required to deliver on a range of issues such as land management, biodiversity, water management, journeys, and renewable energy generation. WODC has already introduced its Net Zero Carbon Toolkit and its Sustainability Standards Checklist. Both of these are to be applauded and it is important that they be widely applied and implemented.

Charlbury Town Council has set up specialist Working Groups to address each of the key issues. This application has been authored by its Buildings Working Group.

Proposal

To engage with Charlbury residents, WODC Planning Department and local builders to develop the knowledge and skills base to establish an end-to-end supply chain which will facilitate the refurbishment of homes to net zero.

Objectives

To lead and catalyse wider transformative change, particularly to:

- Engage the residents of Charlbury in understanding the key elements of improving the energy efficiency and carbon performance of their homes whilst at the same time improving both winter and summer comfort.
- Increase the uptake of WODC's Sustainability Standards Checklist.
- Use the development of whole house plans for a range of house types which illustrate the path to net zero carbon.
- Encourage local builders to acquire the knowledge and skills to improve energy and carbon performance when they are engaged to deliver home improvements.
- Identify the challenges of retrofit for the planning system, including the barriers to implementation, and to work collaboratively with WODC Planning Department to develop new guidance and tools which will speed up planning decisions for enhanced refurbishment applications.

Scope

The plan will cover the parish of Charlbury in the first instance. The model and some of the whole house plans may apply to other areas in West Oxfordshire.

Partners

Charlbury Town Council, Cosy Homes Oxfordshire and Sustainable Charlbury.

Approach

Homeowners, planners and builders are all crucial to the successful refurbishment of homes to net zero carbon. It is therefore proposed to work closely with a few householders who have already done work on their homes to use these as an educational tool, to engage with Cosy Homes Oxfordshire that is already working in the area on delivering whole house plans and the subsequent building works, and then to engage with WODC planners on what has worked so we can all learn together and understand how best to ensure that delivering net zero carbon refurbishment is a collaborative process.

Process

Activity/ies A

Organize an Open Homes event in early Autumn with homes that have already taken action to make their homes low energy and low carbon. Given the current urgent need for householders to reduce their home energy use, we expect interest in the topic to be high on residents' agendas.

Activity/ies B

Identify ten homes which best represent those typical of significant Charlbury estates. We will work with homeowners that they would be comfortable for their completed plans to be included in our report, or agree an anonymisation protocol.

Meeting with Cosy Homes, to start identification of at least 20 householders from 10 different house styles

Engage Assessors and Retrofit Coordinators to undertake surveys.

Retrofit Coordinators commissioned to prepare whole house plans including modelling the expected energy and carbon performance.

Complete the reports and feedback to participating residents. Identify tasks that can be done in the short/medium/long term and with residents, and establish their appetite for implementation of recommendations.

Run an engagement programme with all residents based on the report.

Activity/ies C

A series of engagement workshops with WODC cross-functional teams responsible for planning and climate action planning to:

- explore the potential impact of the typology whole house plans on planning guidance and decisions in Charlbury
- discuss the possibility of developing a Retrofit Design Code into their planning guidance
- to include any conclusions drawn and recommendations for future planning applications, including, for example, Retrofit Passports.

Activity/ies D

Work with WODC:

- to engage with local builders to pilot free training courses on sustainable refurbishments
- to work with the local colleges to include training appropriate for refurbishment to improve energy, carbon and ecological performance.

Activity/ies E

Run a second engagement programme with all residents based on the sum of these activities.

Costs

Activity/ies A: £1500 to employ someone on a short-term contract to find relevant homes, to prepare material about the energy and carbon performance of those homes, their comfort, lessons to be learned and to create publicity materials and activities as required.

Activity/ies B: £7,000 for the employment of Retrofit Coordinators to prepare and model whole house plans and to prepare a report based on the outcomes.

Activity/ies C: £7,000 for the employment of Retrofit Coordinator/s to prepare and run the workshops.

Activity/ies D: £4,000 drawing on existing and new training materials and payments to builders for attending a training day

Activity/ies E: £1,500

Resources

1. Coordination / administrative support for the Open House event and engagement strategies at the beginning and end of the project
2. Expert support in the form of Retrofit Coordinators to develop whole house plans and to model the expected energy and carbon outcomes.
3. A trainer to work with builders.

