

Funding Report – Institute for the Inhabitants of West Knowle

Partnership approach

Since receiving the Chesshire Lehmann grant, the Institute for the Inhabitants of West Knowle have strengthened their links with other community organisations on the Knowle West estate, forming a partnership called Future Fit Bristol. Other partners include the Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC), who work with the community to develop the creative, educational and social potential of people in the surrounding area, and Re:work who aim to 're-engage the disengaged' by offering training to young people and those who wish to re-enter the world of work.

The researcher was heavily involved in developing both the formal aims and objectives of Future Fit Bristol and the timeline for the project. The focus of the partnership is aiming to reduce fuel poverty on the estate by improving the energy efficiency of homes, whilst training and employing local unemployed people to carry out the work.

It is felt that through forming this partnership, it will facilitate more effective and impactful work with those in fuel poverty, achieving more by working together than each partner could accomplish working in isolation.

Connecting with other projects

During the past six months, the researcher has been contacting and forming links with related projects within the local area and nationally. This includes the Bristol based Centre for Sustainable Energy, Bristol Green Doors and large-scale refurbishment programs across the country. This has focused on projects working in deprived areas and those that are aiming to tackle fuel poverty. This has helped to grow understanding of what has worked in other projects and identified possible ways of making the larger project long term financially sustainable (through methods such as revolving funds).

Links have also been formed with Bristol City Council, from which it is hoped that a good working partnership can be formed. So far the relationship has encouraged the sharing of useful and relevant information relating to the estate, and it is hoped that this will continue.

Behavioural change

One of the key parts of the partnership with the KWMC is the learning that they bring regarding behaviour change. They have been working for a number of years on behaviour related environmental project, such as DEHEMS, the Carbon Makeover Project and the Leccy

Project (<http://www.kwmc.org.uk>), and their involvement enables the successes of these projects to be incorporated into the Future Fit Bristol project. Work has begun on identifying areas of behaviour that can be tackled with homeowners alongside the physical refurbishment (such as understanding heating controls, energy consumption of appliances), with the aim of reducing people's energy consumption and therefore working towards alleviating fuel poverty.

Other contributing factors to fuel poverty on the estate have been identified, such as the prevalence of key meters in the area. Links have been formed with groups such as the Bristol Debt Advice Centre energy department, and information is in the process of being compiled regarding cheaper tariffs for those with key meters. It is hoped that such changes can contribute to easing the financial cost of energy for local people.

Energy assessments

Whilst no assessments or interviews have yet been carried out, building on previous knowledge, the researcher has developed a brief for the development of a tailored assessment method. Current assessment tools do not consider occupant behaviour, often resulting in a miscalculation of energy consumption and anticipated savings (see <http://assets.gentoogroup.com/assets/Downloads/Retrofit%20Reality%203%20final.pdf>). A custom tool would take advantage of the homogeneity of the housing stock, include occupant behaviour and output the advice and information in a format that is relevant to the audience on the estate. This would take structural and behavioural information about a house and evaluate the appropriate measures in terms of their energy, financial and CO2 savings. It is hoped that this will be an effective tool for the alleviation of fuel poverty, and further funding has been applied for to develop this into an easy to use IT tool.

Mapping of the estate house types and refurbishment options

A key area of work carried out by the researcher has been identifying housing types and potential refurbishment options. Understanding the structure of the buildings is integral to deciding the optimum measures to install. Working alongside Bristol City Council and local residents, many details of the housing type on the estate have been identified. Approximately 4,000 of the 5,500 estate houses are of a homogenous design, with a limited number of layout designs and identical construction techniques (e.g. 1930's redbrick cavity wall). Research has begun on the possible upgrades that can be made to these houses, as well as investigating the existing rate of installation of energy efficiency measures (such as cavity wall and loft insulation). The focus has been on identifying standard and scalable measures that will result in the greatest energy and financial savings, thus contributing most significantly to fuel poverty reduction in the area.

On the estate, 45% of properties are council owned, 45% owner occupied and 10% privately rented. It has been discovered that the council have offered cavity and loft insulation to all residents (for free to council tenants, and free or heavily subsidised to other residents, depending on their eligibility). However, there has not been complete uptake and so it is felt that these options should be pursued further as they offer the best savings. Most properties are double glazed already, but draught proofing is a simple and inexpensive measure that has been identified as an effective and appropriate measure. Alongside this, the upgrading of heating systems and controls (alongside education on the use of them) will be an effective way to reduce energy consumption. Further research is continuing in this area.

Another 500 houses are designated as hard-to-treat, being of 1970's "No-fines" concrete construction. Whilst these properties are under threat of demolition through a local regeneration scheme, the researcher has been able to conduct extensive research into other projects across the country where similar buildings have been refurbished successfully.

Energy generation

Work has also been carried out into the potential for energy generation on the estate, focusing on solar panels. Research has been conducted into potential ways that solar panels might be available for houses on the estate, given the lack of capital available to many residents. Links have been formed with a Bristol based solar cooperative, aiming to remove the upfront cost of installation whilst still providing the maximum amount of benefit to the local residents and community.

Training and employment

A key element of the Future Fit Bristol partnership is the emphasis on local training and employment. Through the experience of Re:work and the structure that they have in place, this aspect of the project will be possible. Planning of the format of training schemes for local unemployed people is well underway (both short courses and apprentice type schemes). This project also includes upskilling of local builders in green building techniques, and research has been carried out into relevant courses and contact made.

It is felt that fuel poverty will be further reduced by providing employment opportunities for local people, increasing their income and stimulating the local economy.

Funding

The researcher has also devoted significant time to sourcing further funding for the project. This includes compiling a database of potential funding sources and submitting a number of funding applications (from which further funds have already been received).

Work has also begun into compiling information regarding eligibility for grants towards the installation of energy efficiency measures. This will be provided to residents when relevant, reducing some of the financial barriers to refurbishment that may exist.