

Advancing sustainable energy policy and practice for over 25 years

Summary

Ashden Energy Champions are organisations playing a central, catalytic role in making a range of energy efficiency and renewable energy projects happen at a local level in the UK. Their role can be in the form of advice, practical support, coordination or other involvement.

The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) in Bristol has advanced sustainable energy policy and practice for over 25 years. Its work includes technical projects, providing advice, inspiring education and training programmes, and improving policy-making and strategy development. At any given time CSE staff will be working on around 60 projects. Although some aspects of CSE work is focused on Bristol and the South West of England, its educational and policy activities are at national level, and it has active links within Europe.

A core part of the work of CSE is on energy efficiency. Its local energy advice service reaches around 16,000 householders per year, and has become the model for the national network of 52 energy advice centres. CSE also designs and runs specific efficiency programmes. These include 'Warmer lets' developed to improve energy efficiency in the private rental sector of housing. It has led to heating and insulation improvements in over 500 privately rented homes. Another project is assessing ways of giving feedback to consumers on their energy consumption which, if done well, can trigger significant energy savings.

Several CSE programmes have been developed to provide support to specific groups in promoting energy issues: 'Bristol Energy Action Network' works with 30 community groups in Bristol; 'Warming Mendip' has trained 30 community and voluntary groups to provide energy advice and initiate installation of efficiency measures throughout rural Somerset. CSE developed and runs the national programme on 'Community Action for Energy' which provides training and support to both community groups and professionals.

Work done by CSE on raising the importance of energy issues within the school curriculum has had a national impact. A wide range of educational and teaching resources has been developed, closely linked to National Curriculum subjects and targets at all levels. CSE also manages programmes to help teachers deliver energy education teaching. The 'Energy Matters' and 'Bright Sparks' programmes have reached over 180,000 children in 2000 schools over the past five years. CSE emphasises the importance of assessing the effectiveness of all their work. For example, an evaluation which showed that energy saving behaviour improved in the homes of 76% of children who had taken part in the 'Energy Matters' programme - a clear endorsement of the effectiveness of good education about energy use.

CSE has assisted the delivery of a range of practical renewable energy projects. Their recent 'Pitching for solar' project provided information and sourced part-funding to install solar water heating in 12 campsites across the South West of England, which will be used and seen by over 15,000 visitors per year. They are also helping a group of 15 mill-owners in Mendip restore their historic mills with hydroelectric turbines and ground-sourced heat pumps.

The practical experience which CSE has gained over the years is the foundation for its extensive programme of policy and research work, which is highly influential at a regional and national level. One important area where CSE has had significant influence on policy is in fuel poverty. CSE, in partnership with Bristol University, developed an indicator to predict the level of fuel poverty in each electoral ward in England. This is now widely used to target resources to improve energy efficiency in fuel-poor homes. CSE has also been a leader in highlighting the problems of fuel poverty in rural areas, and in developing strategies to address them. Several recent projects have supported the development of renewable energy policies and strategies in the South West of England.

CSE works actively to promote wider understanding of local sustainable energy. One priority is the provision of detailed reports on the findings of all its completed projects on its website. Since 2003, CSE has also committed to making all its educational materials freely available. To mark its 25th anniversary in 2004, CSE drew together what it regarded as the seven key lessons it had learned from its work, which will guide its future activities.

The organisation

CSE is an independent charity which was founded in 1979 by four local activists. The mission of CSE is to advance sustainable energy policy and practice, by engaging local people and communities in meeting real needs for environmentally sound and affordable energy services.

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Management, finance and partnerships

CSE employs 35 staff, including a management team of six people, under the strategic direction of a Board of Trustees. Their annual turnover of about £1.3 million is earned by running a wide range of individually-funded projects. The largest sources of project funds are national Government and Agencies, grants and local authorities.

Use of the Ashden Award

During 2006, the Centre for Sustainable Energy continued to extend its influence and impact in supporting effective sustainable energy practice and policy. Key achievements include:

- Delivering energy efficiency advice to 26,500 households in the Avon and Somerset area, cutting their lifetime carbon dioxide emissions by 36,500 tonnes and saving them more than £1 million on their fuel bills.
- Carrying out a pilot for the Climate Change Challenge in local secondary schools. This project will be replicated during 2007.
- Supporting, principally through technical and funding advice, community-engaged renewable initiatives leading to the installation of some 700kW of small-scale renewable energy technologies during 2006.
- Securing more than £0.25 million for an advice and grants programme for small-scale biomass heating installations across the South West, creating demand to underpin newly co-ordinated wood fuel supply chains.
- Completing the training of more than 1,000 local planners and councillors from across England in workshops on wind power planning issues and on micro-renewables. An e-

newsletter service and resource bank on planning issues with renewable energy was also created.

This report is based on information provided to the Ashden Awards judges by CSE; and findings from a visit by two of the Ashden judges to see their work in Bristol and Somerset.

Dr Anne Wheldon, Technical Director of the Ashden Awards, May 2006.

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