

## **Arun District Council**

### **Roger Wood**

## **District council brings energy efficiency throughout its operations**

### **Summary**

Arun District Council is responsible for a region within West Sussex on the South Coast of England, with headquarters in the town of Littlehampton. The area has low unemployment, but many of the jobs are relatively low-wage, and a large percentage of the population are retired, some living in mobile home parks. In total there are 140,000 people in 65,000 households within the Arun district.

Despite not having a large budget for sustainable energy work, Arun has been able to make significant progress by carefully targeting funds and forming partnerships with other organisations. It has managed to fully insulate and double-glaze 99% of council housing, while some sheltered housing units also have solar thermal water heating and CHP is being installed at others. By setting aside money for energy efficiency in the rolling fifteen-year building maintenance plan, it has ensured that there is a steady reduction in energy demand in both housing and council offices. In the private sector it has been able to use the discretionary budget to fund a range of energy efficiency work, including free insulation for the over-60s, with the assistance of utility companies and government grants. Arun has also been able to influence staff behaviour through the Sustainable Working and You (SWAY) group, set in up cooperation with the trade union Unison. The group has been raising the profile of energy use at work and has surveyed staff on transport use in preparation for creating a travel plan. An electronic bulletin board is now available for staff to share ideas on good environmental practice.

The key to the success of Arun in sustainable energy work has been having enthusiastic and supportive council officers, and more recently council members as well. Partnering with other local authorities, businesses and NGOs has also enabled Arun to make sure the money it spends on sustainable energy has the largest impact possible.

### **The council and district**

Arun District Council is responsible for a region on the south coast of England, within West Sussex. The district includes 14 miles of coastline, the town of Littlehampton, where the council headquarters are based, Bognor Regis and the historic town of Arundel. The council employs about 475 full-time equivalent staff, had a budget in 2007 of about £87 million, and is responsible for over 65,000 households, representing a population of over 140,000.

The key people involved in the energy work of the council are Roger Wood (Deputy Head of Environmental Health), Nigel Horwill (Head of Surveying and Estates), Colin Rogers (Director of Services), Rod Thick (Housing Surveyor) and Jo Brooks (Energy Efficiency Officer).

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## **Context**

Arun District Council's area includes both wealthy and deprived regions, and the area is a popular retirement destination; Arun is among the top ten councils in the UK for the number of residents aged over 75. Although there is a good level of employment within the area, many of the jobs are low-wage, with the largest industries being horticulture (including growing flowers in glasshouses), tourism, a cosmetics factory and a printed circuit board factory. Historically there was a significant boat building industry, including building lifeboats, but this has reduced considerably. There also used to be a factory producing refrigerators, employing 5,000 people, but production has now been moved overseas.

The housing is mixed with the predominant building type being semi-detached and detached. There are a significant number of bungalows and flats along with multiply-occupied properties. Considerable new build is taking place which contrasts with the established Victorian terraced properties, and there are 3,500 council-owned homes dating from 1900 to 1990. There are also a large number of mobile home parks, and although some are for holiday use, many are residential.

## **Sustainable energy policy**

The heart of Arun council's policy on energy and the environment is the Carbon Management Action Plan, which was developed with the help of Creative Environmental Networks (CEN). The plan covers all departments, and addresses issues from energy consumption in council offices and transport use to energy efficiency in homes and fuel poverty. The plan was officially approved in March 2007 and has subsequently influenced policy and actions, and was reviewed in March 2008.

One simple but effective part of the policy on energy is the Asset Management Plan, a fifteen-year rolling plan of maintenance on all council-owned property. The plan has been modified to include a review of energy use every time a building becomes due for maintenance, and money is also set aside for improvements in energy efficiency, through measures such as insulation and upgrading the heating systems. Another important part of the Arun energy strategy is tackling fuel poverty, which it achieves through a number of schemes to provide insulation and heating system upgrades either discounted or free to residents. The fuel poverty strategy is updated annually.

Arun has a procurement policy through which purchasing decisions are made according to three weighted parameters: price, quality and legal compliance. The 'quality' factor includes both environmental factors and use of local suppliers. Examples of the environmental factors which are considered are: energy efficiency, when purchasing new equipment; 'green' tariffs must always be considered for electricity purchase; source of materials, transport distance and disposal route must be considered for building projects.

Arun is also a partner in the Local Area Agreement 2006-09 involving all Councils in West Sussex which includes targets on reducing carbon emissions and improving energy efficiency

## **Sustainable energy within the council's own estate**

Within its own offices and other buildings Arun has worked to reduce the use of energy and other resources through the Sustainable Working And You (SWAY) group, supported by the trade union Unison. The group conducts energy saving campaigns in the office, using posters and running a quiz, and has recently surveyed staff on how they travel to work, getting an impressive response

rate of over 50%. An electronic notice board has been started for sharing ideas of environmental best practice. Future plans include setting up car-share schemes and purchasing bicycles for staff to use for local journeys within Littlehampton. Staff have been active in encouraging council members to take more action on environmental matters.

Within the civic centre in Littlehampton, all printing and photocopying is logged to users' accounts, so that departmental quotas can be monitored. Paper documents are being scanned into a document management system in an effort to reduce paper use and printing. The building itself has had energy-efficient lighting and thermostatic radiator valves installed. Monitoring has not been very thorough until recently, but a new data-logging system is now keeping careful track of energy use. This has identified an unexpectedly high baseload demand for electricity, with the IT infrastructure thought to be the major contributor – an issue which is being addressed.

The council-owned housing stock has been upgraded to improve its energy efficiency, as part of the five-year rolling plan for maintenance. Houses and flats have had cavity wall and loft insulation installed, low energy light bulbs fitted, and single-glazed windows replaced with double-glazed. These upgrades have been completed in 99% of the Arun housing stock, and solar thermal water heating and gas-fired CHP units have also been installed in some sheltered housing blocks. Residents have seen an immediate benefit from the reduction of energy bills, but another important benefit is increased social interaction, as people with under-heated homes tend to isolate themselves socially. Residents' health is also improved by being able to keep their homes at an appropriate temperature and avoid damp problems. The use of local contractors, wherever possible, has minimised the transport needed to undertake these improvements.

## **Wider community**

Arun has worked hard to improve energy efficiency in private housing stock as well as council housing. Fuel poverty is tackled through two programmes:

- Free insulation for the over-60s, which is funded 50% by EDF Energy and 50% from the Arun discretionary renewal budget. The scheme is targeted at those whose pension is their main source of income, and multiple indices of deprivation are used to identify the areas most in need of assistance. Over 1,800 homes had been insulated by early 2008.
- Top-ups for Warm Front grants, which are often insufficient on their own to cover the cost of heating system upgrades. 56 top-up payments had been approved by early 2008, some of them over £1,000.

In the private rented sector Arun has two schemes to encourage landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties, one using grants and the other accreditation:

- Grants are available for licensed HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) to enable landlords to install an A-rated boiler, thermostatic radiator valves and insulation. The grant can be up to £5,000 but must be match-funded by the landlord. The take-up of these grants has been slow, with nine given by early 2008, but this must be seen in context – there are less than 60 licensed HMOs within the Arun council area.
- In the Bognor area there are a significant number of students. Here Arun runs an accreditation programme for landlords, covering fire safety and energy efficiency. Students prefer to rent houses that are accredited, so there is an incentive for landlords to bring their properties up to the required safety and efficiency standards.

For private homeowners there are also two key programmes in operation:

- A home insulation scheme, where the council promotes insulation programmes run by local installers, and can provide partial or full grants according to the ability of a household to make a contribution. 2,365 households had taken advantage of this programme by early 2008.
- The Sussex Solar scheme, in which Arun and other local councils have negotiated special prices with an installer of solar thermal water heating. Arun also tops up the £400 grant from

the Low Carbon Buildings Programme (LCBP) with a £100 grant from its discretionary budget to encourage households to purchase the systems. 15 installations had been completed by early 2008. A number of unscrupulous solar companies operate in South East England, and this may have discouraged people from using the scheme.

As has occurred in council-owned properties, the work in private properties has also resulted in reduced bills, increased social interaction and improved health. Households with solar water heating find that it produces nearly all of their hot water from late spring to early autumn and in some cases for most of the year.

The global environment benefits from reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, estimated, using standard average factors, as over 11,700 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2007 for all the technical measures in council-owned and private housing. Information and education about energy efficiency will have led to further savings.

## **Community engagement**

In order to engage with different sectors of the community Arun works with a variety of groups on sustainable energy outreach:

- Arun has a partnership with the local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) on energy, and is also one of their largest funders. Arun briefs the CAB staff on the different energy programmes they are running, so the CAB can make their clients aware of those that they could take advantage of.
- Arun works in partnership with Anchor Staying Put, a home improvement agency that helps to upgrade homes for elderly and disabled people to assist with independent living. Through them Arun is able to reach out to this sector of the community; Anchor helps residents complete application forms and all clients receive free low energy light bulbs. Both Anchor and CAB help residents to secure additional funding to top up Warm Front grants when required.
- The EcoFaith programme is organised by the Diocese of Chichester in partnership with a range of local authorities in the Sussex area, including Arun. The group focuses on helping members of churches and other faith groups to improve the sustainability of their lifestyles.
- Along with several other local authorities, Arun helps fund a Mobile Energy Efficiency Advice Centre, which sets up in a variety of locations across West Sussex to raise awareness on sustainable energy issues, carry out surveys and give away low energy light bulbs. The mobile unit is operated by West Sussex Energy Efficiency Advice Centre on behalf of the councils, and opportunities to increase its use outside West Sussex are being investigated
- Council staff have put together a range of presentations and workshops on sustainable energy for schools, and are increasingly being requested to deliver these.
- A range of promotional materials are made available to the community. For instance 'Green information bags' are provided to people who move into a home in the district, via estate and letting agents. Cards containing information about how residents can gain assistance to improve insulation have been included in bags which are used to deliver prescription medicines. Information about grants, renewable energy and specific energy events is included in the Council magazine, and an update is also given every six months to Parish Councils.
- Some communities have been inspired to go further in improving the environment: for instance, Angmering is now taking part in a low carbon village project.

## **Management and partnerships**

One of the keys to Arun's success in sustainable energy is that several council officers are strongly supportive of the work. In the early years the council members were less interested in sustainable energy issues, but now have become much more supportive, and recently attended an energy workshop that EST helped Arun to run, which built on the previous assistance of CEN. The other

factor helping Arun is that staff involvement in sustainability is high throughout the council, and the SWAY group is no doubt a significant factor in this.

The key partnerships for Arun are:

- **Creative Environmental Networks (CEN)**, the environmental consultancy that has helped Arun produce its Carbon Reduction Action Plan.
- **West Sussex District and Borough Councils and West Sussex County Council**, with which Arun works on a range of projects, including Sussex Solar, EcoFaith, Healthy Homes Partnership and various affordable warmth programmes.
- **Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB)**, who advise their clients on reducing their energy costs and accessing grants.
- **Anchor Staying Put**, who assist residents in applying for grants to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.
- **Impetus Consulting**, who have worked with Arun on a range of sustainable energy projects.
- **HCL Energy**, who work with Arun on provision of loft and cavity wall insulation.
- **Diocese of Chichester**, which is the main partner in the EcoFaith programme.
- **Eaga Partnership**, who have worked with Arun on the HMO energy efficiency and EcoFaith programmes.
- **West Sussex EEAC**, who operate the mobile advice centre and work on the Sussex Solar programme.
- **Arun Unison**, who support the Sustainable Working and You (SWAY) group.
- **West Sussex and South East HECA forums**, which have been useful groups with whom to share the experiences of different projects and initiatives, both successful and less so.
- **West Sussex Healthy Homes Partnership**, in which Arun hosts the Fuel Poverty Co-ordinators post on behalf of the Partnership which includes the Primary Care Trust and has stretched targets to reduce fuel poverty.

## Finance and payment

The various projects that Arun works on are funded in different ways, but in many cases the council has chosen to use some of its discretionary budget to fund sustainable energy work. It also partners with other councils on projects such as EcoFaith and the Mobile EEAC, and with energy suppliers such as EDF on free insulation for the over-60s.

## Potential for growth and replication

Arun already has plans in progress to increase its sustainable energy work. In its own estate, it will be installing CHP and improved metering into more of its sheltered housing units and developing a travel plan for its staff. In the private sector, there is likely to be an increase in the take-up of Warm Front and EEC/CERT funding in the community, given the high average age in Arun and the fact that all over 70's now qualify automatically under CERT for subsidised insulation. Arun is looking to prepare an energy profile for the housing stock in its area, in order to better plan where to spend money in future.

Arun has demonstrated that a local authority can make significant progress in improving energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty without large sums of money. By targeting cash at those who need it most and partnering with businesses, other local authorities and NGOs, it has been able to make the most of what it has. The vital ingredient for a local authority to succeed in sustainable energy work is to have the support of council officers or members, and ideally both.

This report is based on information provided to the Ashden Awards judges by Arun District Council, and findings from a visit by two members of the judging team to see their work.

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