

LAA NI 186 - **The One Tonne Challenge**

Creating a network of Community Environmental [Champions or Ambassadors](#)

The One Tonne Challenge will develop and test a model for working at a local level in ways that empower and support the learning of community groups or communities of interest (including school communities and faith groups), with the **overall aim of moving towards sustainable living and reducing CO₂ emissions in Warwickshire.**

A sustainable community must address local to global links, equity and inclusion, present and future needs – all set within the context or boundary of environmental limits. It will be a 3 year project.

Aims

- To explore ways of working closely with local communities in order to define and work towards new patterns of sustainable living.
- To engage (state how many and which community groups). To work in-depth with (state how many) and in less depth with other with (state how many) groups.
- To build the knowledge, capacity, capability, commitment, ownership and responsibility among participants to increase sustainability.
- To embed the learning within the project community (the groups and the project team);
- To consider the role of local and national governance structures to overcome any barriers to sustainable living.

The project will fall somewhere between community development and community engagement.

Community engagement is about supporting communities to become involved in local decision-making and other activities. This includes providing information, collecting opinions on a survey, or may involve some more in-depth participation, such as in participatory appraisal approaches.

- To explain the sustainability agenda to participants.

Community development is a process of support for a community to achieve its own goals. A community development approach means that a project team member does not bring their own agenda to the table, but works with groups to identify the needs of the community and methods to address issues which they identify.

- To support the groups to identify the issues they want to take action on.
- To support them in their decisions and provide advice on how to tackle these issues, even if does not precisely follow LAA priorities.

Different from community-based sustainability.

- To start where the community are, to support their values and positive impulses within a broad picture of what is sustainable. The project will not be designed to sell them an idea and persuade them to sign up and start work.

Different from traditional community development.

- Not led by an analysis of local needs, followed by creating a vision, planning, gaining resources and taking action. Focused on the motivations of the individuals in the groups, and what they want to do, depending on what immediate opportunities were available locally, to move towards sustainable living.

Bigger than environmental action.

- Although the groups will primarily work on environmental issues (e.g. energy saving, water saving, recycling), it will be possible to identify some social and economic benefits from projects that started as environmental. For example, book swaps have social implications in helping improve literacy, and economic implications by providing free resources for people on limited incomes.

Empowerment rather than behaviour change.

- Beyond practical improvements there will be a significant change in the confidence and capacity of the people within the community groups, and the likely sustainability of the groups themselves into the long term.

Community Processes

- What is their existing knowledge about environmental issues and commitment?
- People processes need to be flexible, responsive and sensitive. Personal support will be key. Groups will have access to the technical expertise they needed (e.g. on climate change, energy and from local authority recycling officers). The groups' main demand will be for the regular personal support by a project team member which will be more important than any other resource offered.
- Community groups prefer to concentrate on action rather than reflection and learning. The best approach will be little and often: regular reviews of what worked well or less well in specific activities, what they learned and what they would do differently next time – rather than formal monitoring and evaluation throughout.

An approach to working with Community Groups

- support and facilitation ... not direction
- resources ... not leadership
- learning ... not recruitment
- guidance ... not rigid processes and bureaucracy
- personal ... not objective
- enthusiastic/involved ... not neutral or distanced
- light touch ... not heavy-handed
- collaborative and responsive ... not instructional.

Such an approach will inspire and motivate but will not take away from the group members the sense that the group is their's, and it is doing what they want to do – that they own the group and its achievements.

Providing support in this way is a highly skilled, professional, demanding and resource intensive task, but it is essential to enable group members to achieve what they set out to do.

It needs constant:

- vigilance: to spot anything that might be going wrong before it becomes a problem;
- sensitivity: especially to the fact that this is being done in people's spare time and they don't want processes that are too formal or pressured or bureaucratic – it has to be enjoyable (meetings should be as informal and relaxed as possible and not use formal methods);
- responsiveness: providing help and resources when needed.

Identifying skills and knowledge

- Should be a secondary objective for the project.
- Any benchmarking for external purposes needs to be done very informally and sensitively. Group members will not want to be ‘measured’ in any way.

It can be useful to enable people to begin to share their hopes as well as their past experience with the group. This empowers them to start to work towards goals that they really care about. It may therefore be best to start with some basic questions, such as:

- What have you done before? A brief skills audit of the group can reveal hidden talents, and may help people to transfer skills that they might use at work or home into the group and projects.
- What else do you need to know?
- What additional skills might be needed to manage the project and the group?
- How much knowledge do you have of the issues of sustainability? (With scores of one to 10 for environment, social, economic and governance separately.)
- How much are you already doing personally that contributes to each of the four legs of sustainability? (Again separate scores for each leg.)
- How much do you talk about sustainability issues to other people? (A lot, to not at all.)
- How much do you know about the global implications of sustainability – the bigger picture? (A lot, to none.)
- How responsible do you feel personally about the need to take action, or find out about, sustainability issues?
- How much do you think sustainability matters? (A lot, to not at all).

Identifying motivations

To create a debate ask questions such as:

- What do you think sustainable living is?
- What does sustainable living mean to you personally, in terms of values, attitudes and behaviours?
- What is your motivation for getting involved?
- What do you want to achieve personally?
- What do you want the group to achieve?
- What sorts of ‘hooks’ encourage people to get involved in something? What sort of incentives work? What doesn’t work?
- Should we share ideas/link up with other groups?
- How do we identify community needs? Who do we target?
- Where can we get more information?

Champions	Ambassadors
Sell a message and tell people what to do	Focuses on mutual learning, not telling
Trained to deliver/present a message	Employs a ‘You can do it’/‘We can change things’ message: a collective movement
Use cascade methods to spread the message	Works from a position of personal strength (own group) and moral authority, as well as confidence from having done it
Isolated individuals locally, even if county support is provided	Supported individuals, working collectively within the local group
Agrees message to be disseminated	Starts where people are, and focuses on what they can do – their interests and skills

Possible Actions

- energy audit of the church, community centre, village hall;
- presentations at community group events;
- short courses on sustainability issues linked to community group educational activities;
- establishing and running recycling schemes for a range of materials;
- setting up compost bins;
- putting hippos into all toilets to save water (a hippo is a device which fits into the toilet's cisterns to save three litres of water every time it flushes);
- changing light bulbs to energy saving bulbs;
- introducing environmentally friendly cleaning materials in the community group as well as in group members' homes;
- persuading community groups to switch to recycled paper;
- running fun and educational events for children with environmental messages, including give-aways made from recycled materials;
- publishing a column in the parish/school magazine with hints and tips for reducing environmental damage and waste (e.g. energy saving);
- setting up a notice board with regularly updated information on environmental actions that people can easily take;
- answering individual questions from people at school/church/or public events to help people change what they do and why (e.g. climate change);
- working for awards and prizes, to gain publicity for what the group is doing, as well as boosting the morale of members (if they are successful) (e.g. Eco-Congregation Award);
- joining national organisations and taking part in their campaigns and activities;
- lobbying for specific changes e.g. for the council to take a wider range of materials for recycling, shops to have recycling bins on their premises or nearby;
- getting free equipment (e.g. hippos and water butts) and giving them away at events, including through raffles;
- organising book swaps to recycle used books and providing resources to support literacy, especially among those who cannot afford to buy books;
- organising other 'swap it' events: bringing and taking rather than 'bring and buy'; surveying local residents to find out what they thought were priorities for the group;
- growing food within school grounds, as a learning opportunity and to improve nutrition by providing fruit and vegetables;
- organising practical environmental improvements such as clearing litter from village greens, clearing ponds, etc.
- carbon and ecological foot-printing – if used as a project not a measure of success.

Wider benefits from action

- Group members are likely to grow in confidence, develop their skills and learn new ones. They also grow in ambition and aspiration.
- Once successful in one area, members will want to do more and different activities, increasing the positive impact they can have on the environment, in the wider community and as a contribution to sustainability more generally.
- Synergy - as few community groups have the resources to achieve all their aims and objectives alone, there will be an increase in networking and collaborating with others.

Measuring success

Measure what matters – quantity (e.g. numbers of people involved, numbers of trees planted) as well as quality of impact (longer term and less tangible outcomes e.g. greater confidence and skills among group members, increased aspirations, wider awareness and interest, readiness for change, groups continuing into the long term etc.)

Avoid focusing on topical political concerns. The concerns of community groups tend to be fairly long term. They are around local environmental quality and quality of life. Funding can be tied to wider political concerns (e.g. reducing carbon emissions), which can have little relevance to local community action and potential local achievements.

- Empowerment and understanding among group members, rather than personal behaviour change; Number of confident, skilled and active community members.
- Spreading awareness of sustainability in the wider community, rather than specific physical reductions in emissions; Areas of active and influential roles in local and wider decision-making. Any developed local services in response to priority needs.
- Sustainability of the group, in term of its long-term survival and ability to function well and achieve what it wants to do, rather than numbers of people involved. Productive networks and relationships with other agencies and organisations.

Caution

- Recognise the impact of measurement on the measured. Some methods of measurement for sustainable living (e.g. ecological footprint) may not be appropriate for local actions by small informal community groups. Where an inappropriate tool is used, the results may focus on the small scale of changes created by group activities, which can be very de-motivating for the individuals involved.
- Evaluation can be intimidating. Community groups generally operate during people's leisure time, and they can strongly resent being subject to inflexible and intrusive evaluation that reminds them of performance measurement at work, or exams at school. These processes can seem intimidating and heavy-handed. It may be best in many cases to avoid the term 'evaluation' at all. Instead focus work on review and reflection and the benefits that can have for the group and their activities.

Exit Strategy

The aim of any project that works with community groups is create change that contributes to sustainability. The aim is also to leave the groups with the confidence, skills and tools to tackle sustainability issues in the future. The way the support organisation designs and implements its exit strategy is likely to have a major impact on the long-term sustainability of the group.

- Be clear at the start about when the support will end, talk to the community group at regular intervals about this.
- Discuss with groups how the transition phase can be managed so that they are confident enough to take the work forward without in-depth support from an external organisation.
- Build a gradual handover of responsibilities from the support worker to the group so it goes as smoothly as possible.

Conclusion

1. The next small step in a long-term approach could provide the tipping point that will create major change.
2. Influencing others is likely to spread the message further but it won't necessarily encourage deeper change. Bottom-up actions of this sort need to work in close conjunction with wider policy and legislative change to achieve a major shift in culture.
3. Bringing about enough change to reduce the three-planet consumption patterns in the UK will only work as part of a wider solution. This includes policy and legislative change, leading to a bigger shift in culture.
4. Effective work to support community-based action towards sustainable living is highly skilled and resource intensive. Regular personal support from professional experienced workers is crucial.
5. Work at a local level needs to be related to wider legislative and regulatory frameworks, at local and national (and international) levels.
6. With in-depth support, local groups can achieve a great deal in a short space of time and can successfully spread the message about sustainable living to hundreds of local people.

Reference

Community learning and action for sustainable living (CLASL): A guide to supporting communities in sustainable living. Diane Warburton and Niamh Carey. WWF, DEFRA. June 2008.

Links

Action for Sustainable Living www.afsl.org.uk
Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) www.acre.org.uk/
Community Development Exchange www.cdx.org.uk/every-action-counts-0
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens www.farmgarden.org.uk/
Federation for Community Development Learning www.fcdl.org.uk/projects/defra/index.htm
Global Action Plan www.GlobalActionPlan.org.uk
Involve – the participation organisation www.involve.org.uk/home
London Sustainability Exchange www.lsx.org.uk
National Association for Voluntary and Community Action www.navca.org.uk/
New Economics Foundation – Democs www.neweconomics.org/gen/democsuses.aspx
Soil Association <http://www.soilassociation.org/>
WWF Local Matters www.wwflearning.org.uk/localmatters