

East Suffolk Greenprint Forum visit to the Green Britain Centre

Monday 13th April 2015

11 East Suffolk Greenprint Forum members visited the Green Britain Centre, representing seven different communities. The purpose of the visit was to ascertain its usefulness as a resource for East Suffolk Communities and to identify any support and engagement opportunities. The visit cost close to £150, approx. £14 a head, not including food and drinks.

Nine members climbed the 305 step, 67m tall wind turbine and were given a tour of the facilities.

Some facts from the climb:

- The turbine was built in 1999, has a spiral staircase which is surprisingly easy to climb (if you are physically fit) and two rest platforms. It is gearless (direct drive) reducing noise, maintenance costs and friction losses.
- A pre turbine construction survey with the local community showed a high % of residents in favour this increased even more when a follow up survey was carried out once operational this indicates the benefits of correct siting, good turbine choice and proactive consultation.
- The maximum generation capacity (i.e. how much it could produce under ideal wind conditions for this model) is 1.5MW. There is a display unit showing actual generation in real time. The site has been pleased with the generation thus far.
- The 360 degree view from the top on a clear day is amazing. The enclosed viewing platform was designed by Sir Norman Foster, architect of the Gherkin and New Wembley Stadium in London. There are lots of interesting facts to be found on sheets and on the windows.
- The turbine is estimated to have another 15 or so operational years.
- When it comes to the end of its life all the components will be sent for recycling – at the moment a challenge is the fibre glass turbine blades for which there is no known market.
- The offshore/onshore debate rages on, costs of getting crews out there every few days (mix of boats and helicopters) noted by someone with experience at Lowestoft while planning and space for developing as well as some inappropriate developments having a negative impact on community buy in (e.g. flicker and noise) noted as a challenge onshore.

Some snippets from the tour

- The organic certified allotment is being reinvigorated and the site manager has plans for growing sufficient food for the café and a vision for providing fresh food for food banks.
- There is a hive on site and the site manager has plans to increase this – the bees are purely there for pollination, in line with the vegan ethics of Dale Vince founder of Ecotricity.
- A ground mounted 44 panel solar tracking PV array produces roughly 7500 kWh of electricity a year. However it is a lesson in appropriate siting – being under a turbine has resulted in damage due to ice fall from the blades.
- There is a young heritage orchard.
- The measures installed such as grey water recycling, biomass district heating etc. are both a lesson in project development and contract management that many would benefit from (particularly those attending project development/management training) and an opportunity to invest in further to increase the long term educational value of the site.

- There is a theatre that could be used to show films and is used for recycling talks for school children.
- Packages have been developed for all key stages of school (for 10am to 2pm days) and for colleges and universities and they have numerous visits throughout the year.

The discussion

<p>Strengths</p> <p>The only one of its kind. A real sense of scale and also ‘ownership’ when you go up, take pictures and learn about it. Can reduce resistance to onshore turbines as myths are dispelled. Backed by Ecotricity</p>	<p>Weakness</p> <p>Distance – and associated time (It would take between one and half to two hours from most locations) and travel costs (transport and driver hire as well as fuel) noted as a disadvantage for Suffolk Coastal communities in particular.</p> <p>Lack of easy links to public transport</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>A Suffolk/Norfolk asset to support (letters of support to help in funding bids; direct funding if can be worked into funding bids or fundraised for and marketing internally and to attract visitors.)</p> <p>Link to the Volunteer Tourism project – a potential visit. If the site was able to provide accommodation in the form of Yurts for ‘glamping’ even better.</p> <p>Link to Woofing network to gain volunteers.</p> <p>Has the site made use of/linked to Duke of Edinburgh volunteers or scouts and their badges.</p> <p>A-level and higher education engineering students.</p> <p>Link with Suffolk Environmental Education Network and the Broads Environmental Education Network.</p> <p>Raise awareness of site via twitter, facebook, Greenprint Forum Mailout, GPF webpage, ESP website, and Creating the Greenest Communities Newsletter.</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Insufficient income and investment in this asset mean none of us have access to a turbine to climb in the future and/or that there is not enough associated activities/green elements to the centre to attract people.</p>

Actions:

DW to follow up with GB centre to see if any of these connections have already been made and if not to hunt out contact details and make the connections.

DW to send LB/TA information to put into article to go on ESP website, to send to CF to put in Greenest Communities Newsletter, to add to GP mailout.