

# Community Carbon Auditing PACE/PAVO

## Report and findings

*from ecodyfi and collaborators*

*13/9/2022*

### The commission

Originally, the main output was to be an action plan in each of the three agreed communities, following a community level carbon audit – together with this overall report. Very early in the process this was changed to include each of the four communities that had expressed interest in participating: Hay on Wye, Brecon, Knighton and Erwood.

### The team

Led by Andy Rowland and Ann MacGarry at ecodyfi, the team also included Gareth Ellis of The Green Valleys, Vanessa Garwood and Peter Harper. Peter's role was to advise and comment on carbon audit methodologies, but the lion's share of the auditing was done by Gareth, drawing on previous work done by TGV. Gareth (for Brecon and Hay) and Vanessa (for Knighton and Erwood) led the direct work with the communities, being based in Breconshire and Radnorshire, respectively.

### The process

The key actions were to work with the identified communities to complete a carbon audit (as far as is possible at community scale) for each community, to work with them to develop a carbon action plan and to produce a report that would enable other communities to use the methodology themselves.

The communities were identified by PAVO. They were required to have declared a climate emergency but not yet produced an action plan. The number of communities was increased from 3 to 4 as only 4 communities expressed an interest.

The whole process had a very short timescale and PAVO were dealing with launching a number of other projects with the same short timescale. It emerged, as contact was made with the communities, that they had not all fully committed to the process, nor had they all been clear about what they had signed up to (one thought that they were just expressing an interest, rather than applying to be part of the process).

It was supposed to be a process where we supported the town or community council to work with a group or groups in the community to develop a whole community action plan. Not only was the timescale short, it also spanned the summer, when councils usually don't meet, and the election. Councillors are in 'purdah' for 6 weeks before the election and not always sure that they will be re-elected, so it is the most challenging time to try to work with them.

The four communities identified were Brecon, Erwood, Hay and Knighton. The partners recruited to work with local communities were Gareth Ellis and Vanessa Garwood. Gareth, who has previous experience of producing community carbon audits, worked with Brecon and Hay and produced the carbon audits for all four. Vanessa worked with Erwood and Knighton. Peter Harper contributed to the audit methodology. Ann MacGarry did admin. Andy Rowland managed the process. Regular meetings were held (at least once a month) between the team to discuss progress.

Producing a carbon audit for a community involves a number of steps. Data for electricity and mains gas use at a local level is available online (Local Super Output Areas). These areas are small enough to coincide with some of our communities. Where they don't quite coincide with what is locally seen as 'the community' then the council or local group needed to identify the number of extra homes they want to include so that Gareth could factor that in. Where a number of homes did not have mains gas, the council or local group needed to make an estimate of how many were using bottled gas, oil, wood or electricity. In practice it proved to be difficult to get any of these figures from the local contacts. The other elements of carbon impact have to be calculated from data that is only available at county or national (UK) level and is therefore less likely to be accurate. The national figures are recalibrated in a percentage that reflects the lower level of income in Wales, as consumption is normally closely linked to income level.

In addition to this report, it was decided that Gareth would produce a guide to community carbon auditing. This is a 4 page illustrated guide designed to be as easy to use as possible.

The assumption was that it would be a process where the council worked with community groups to produce the action plan. In practice the relationships between councils and community groups varied a great deal and expectations varied. The short time scale made it very difficult to change [influence?] this much.

Brecon & Knighton were town council led, Hay & Erwood were community led with council involvement.

## The four communities

### Hay on Wye

Hay engaged with the process immediately. There is a Net Zero Carbon Hay group which is a unconstituted group of individuals, councillors and community groups representatives with the Town Clerk providing administrative and coordination support. There is already a Town Plan which has some actions that relate to carbon and sustainability.

They were keen to have a carbon survey for businesses so Gareth/group members produced one for them for completion via SurveyMonkey but only one business completed it. Engagement with the business sector is still considered a priority and alternative approaches need to be developed.

As a border Town, the area of Cussop in Herefordshire is immediately adjacent to the Town boundary and it was important to the group that the community here would not be excluded. Following some revision of the audit process it was possible to incorporate an area larger than the LSOA datasets, using a simple proportional increase to include the additional homes in Cussop.

After an initial promising start in February 2022, the group would take a pause for the local Council elections. Unfortunately, the Town Clerk left soon after the election period and this caused some difficulties that extending into the summer as the Town Clerk was the primary contact point. However, the new Clerk and Mayor made significant efforts into quickly reviving the group in late summer, that allowed the audit and beginnings of the action planning process to take place.

The Net Zero Hay group aims to become more active and benefits from a number of members being professionally employed in energy and sustainability industries and the group enjoys a level of technical expertise and competency beyond what would be expected. There is a clear commitment to develop the draft action plan further and ensure a focus on delivery. A meeting on 1/9/22 generated a range of ideas that have been developed into the draft Hay Net Zero action plan for future discussion and delivery.

Hay Town Council aims to review its existing Town Plan and it is likely that any climate actions will be developed as part of the Town Plan review – though this still requires a formal agreement to do so from the Council. This ensures that the climate actions do not stand alone and can be integrated into other themes such as Tourism and Regeneration. An audit for the Councils carbon emissions from their buildings was also completed.

## Brecon

The council has a Climate Emergency Working Group and the Town Council has previously met with community representation from Brecon Climate Action Group. The Council had initially understood that this project would provide an audit of the Town Councils' own direct carbon emission and support the development of their organisational action plan. It was explained that the project had a wider scope than the Town Council and while this was favourably received, concerns were raised over what could be achieved in the tight time scale, given the election and need to follow proper Council procedures.

After the election they did not think it would be possible to do anything quickly, with a number of new councillors. They had already produced a draft action plan for the council itself and support work to this group focussed on reviewing and expanding these actions for future formal adoption through Council. It was agreed that it would not be possible to secure the necessary wider engagement in the time available as it was essential this was properly organised and delivered. Instead, some suggestions for how the Town Council could engage and facilitate wider community involvement would be considered for the Council Action Plan.

The Town Council's immediate requirement was for an audit of carbon emissions from the building they are responsible for. This was produced for them from their utility billing data.

The draft action plan will be discussed at a future Council meeting and amended and expanded before final adoption. There is a clear commitment from BTC to follow up with appropriate actions having declared a climate emergency.

## Erwood

In Erwood there is a new voluntary group with Laura Shewring as a lead and a good mix of members. It's a very proactive group including 3 community councillors. This has been their first project. They held a public meeting to collect community ideas which Vanessa and Gareth attended. It was attended by about 17 people and produced some ideas for the action plan that Laura has collated. They intended to have more meetings with community groups but this didn't happen due to people in the community not having the time to organise it.

The audit is difficult as Erwood is in the same data area as Bronllys, which has mains gas whereas Erwood doesn't. This means the data won't be quite right for either area.

Vanessa can populate an action plan with the things people suggested at the open meeting. The group haven't had time to set up meetings with other groups that they had suggested.

## Knighton

Things started off with a bit of a challenge as it emerged that they thought they were just enquiring, not making a formal application, so the Clerk had to go back to the council meeting for confirmation. The election delayed things as well. They had significant councillor changes and were very difficult to get a response from until July. They were going to have a meeting and set up a sub-group of the council. There doesn't seem to be a voluntary group active in the town.

The audit was delayed because they needed to provide data on non-mains-gas households. Vanessa and Gareth estimated the number of homes using other fuels so that Gareth could complete the audit. There are a lot of homes that don't have gas.

## External evaluation

There has been good contact with Liz Bickerton who is evaluating from an early stage.

## Reflections and lessons learnt

- More time is needed to work with a community before getting going.
- A community group can respond more quickly than a council, who have to pass decisions through monthly or less frequent meetings.
- The councils could put their progress into the end of year reports that they now have to produce.
- The audit should be understood to be limited by the data available, but it does provide a reasonable picture. Groups can use this as a benchmark and use it to stimulate and inform discussion and action plan development.
- The community's action planning is in most cases not really mature enough to lead to funding applications, especially the anticipated Shared Prosperity Fund. However, PACE could consider an umbrella application to take forward this kind of work with a larger number of communities/councils.

Clarity on the project scope and expectations for involvement need to be communicated from the very beginning. The team inherited this difficulty from the short Expression of Interest process; groups were not clear precisely what support would be provided and what their role would be. Specifically – some thought they were literally expressing interest and that they would receive further information that would help them consider whether to “sign up”, and some thought the project concerned only what the council was directly responsible for, as opposed to the whole community's climate impacts. While this was not the cause of significant problems it did generate delays in an already tight timescale.

Securing wide community engagement takes time, desire and resources. Time constraints in particular limited what was achievable, especially with elections and summer holidays within the project period. Groups are often starting from nothing. This is new ground for many but it appears that this project has acted as a catalyst for action, even if currently action plans are not well developed. Action Plan development takes time, consideration, consultation and review.

The audit process was relatively straightforward as the project used existing methodology for domestic energy figures developed by The Green Valleys, drawing on UK Government data but amending that slightly based on local mapping and knowledge. The need to include additional carbon figures for consumption and public services took additional time as this had not been developed previously. Local data on these two elements does not exist and so national figures were used. This part of the audit does allow communities to greater understand the relative impact of goods and services consumed.

## Appendices

- Carbon Audit Reports for 4 communities
- A Guide to using the audit reports
- Methodological note about the audits
- Report on Hay Town Council's direct emissions
- Draft Action Plans for Erwood, Hay Town Council, Hay Zero Hay and Brecon

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