

# Appendix 1.

## Stakeholder participants



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Name	Organisation
Lee Winterbottom	Berneslai Homes
Gail Teasdale	Broadacres Housing Association
James Prestwich	Chartered Institute of Housing
Anna Burke	HACT
Murray Macdonald	Lincolnshire Housing Partnership
Graham Lock	Low Carbon Homes
Kevin Garvey	National Housing Federation
Jonathan Higgs (Chair)	Raven Housing Trust
Gordon Watts	South Yorkshire Housing Association
Helen Phoenix	South Yorkshire Housing Association
Jade Lewis	Sustainable Energy Association
Jenny Brierley	The University of Sheffield
Samantha Granger	Thirteen Group
Jenny Osbourne	Tpas



### Residents from the following landlords attended the resident roundtables

Berneslai Homes	Livin
Beyond Housing	Mosscares St Vincent's
Bolton at Home	North Devon Homes
Broadland Housing Association	North Star Housing Group
CHP	Octavia Housing
Coastline Housing	Orwell Housing
Cross Keys Homes	Prima Group
EMH Homes	Raven Housing Trust
Halton Housing	Soha Housing
Hull City Council	South Yorkshire Housing Association
Johnnie Johnson Housing Trust	Trent and Dove
Karbon Homes	Two Rivers Housing
Leicester City Council	Wythenshawe Community Housing Group
Lincolnshire Housing Partnership	WDH
LiveWest	The Wrekin Housing Group



# PLACESHAPERS & TPAS

Residents' voices in the UK's Net Zero Carbon journey

Why how we talk about green homes and places really matters

Author - James Bryson



# Introduction



“We are pleased to add resident voices to the discussion on how the housing sector can reach net-zero carbon by 2050. The sector has a long journey if it is to achieve its decarbonisation targets and it is vital that residents are with us on

this journey. The themes and recommendations of this report act as a starting point on how decarbonisation could work successfully for housing providers and their residents.”

Jenny Osbourne MBE, Tpas Chief Executive.



“Throughout this year, we’ve been speaking to PlaceShapers members about their key priorities and areas of work. Meeting the net-zero target has been mentioned by everyone. But while lots of thought is being given to business planning, and the new

technology we need, we felt there wasn’t enough focus on the impact on people and places. This report shows, the zero-carbon agenda can connect with what residents value, and a long-term plan for engagement offers opportunities to build on the strong foundations of trust that already exist between many social landlords and their residents.”

Jonathan Higgs, CEO Raven Housing Trust and PlaceShapers Board Member

## Methodology

Evidence gathering for this project consisted of four 90-minute roundtable sessions. The sessions focused on the Government’s net-zero carbon target, what it means for social housing residents and how best to engage and communicate with residents and communities about it.

## Stakeholder session

The first session was attended by 13 stakeholders who were invited to participate based on their wide range of experience and expertise in the housing and sustainability sectors. The participants had been briefed that the discussion would focus specifically on resident engagement. The conversation during the session included examples of good practice, effective communications strategies and highlighted mistakes to avoid.

## Resident sessions

The following three roundtables were attended by social housing residents. This was a self-selecting group of engaged residents who had chosen to participate as they were interested in the subject matter. Although there were several participants who had extensive knowledge of environmental and sustainability policy, most participants were there as active members of their resident’s forum and their priority was to engage with what net-zero carbon meant for them, their homes and their neighbourhoods. Some people knew nothing about low carbon technologies, others were living in homes which had been upgraded with air source heat pumps.

Unlike the stakeholders, the resident participants had not been given a specific brief other than that

the conversation would be on the net-zero carbon agenda and what it meant for their homes. This was deliberate as we started the sessions by asking what level of knowledge they had on the role of housing in decarbonisation. After establishing this, a short presentation was given with further details on how housing related to carbon emissions, specific targets that social landlords must meet and the challenges this presents. The final part of the sessions was a conversation, overseen by the chairperson with a more specific focus on resident engagement and how landlords and others could most effectively work with residents and communities to meet the net zero target.

## Key findings

The key findings and themes of this report have been selected because they were repeatedly highlighted in all sessions by both stakeholders and residents. Often issues raised in one session were illuminated by an example or case study given in another session. Throughout, we have detailed who gave specific quotes or the session specific points were raised in.

The findings can be split into three broad categories:

1. Motivation and engagement – the motivating factors that social landlords can use to engage residents with the net-zero carbon agenda.
2. Communication – how social landlords can effectively communicate with residents to demonstrate the benefits of decarbonisation and their ability to deliver low carbon homes.
3. Trust – how social landlords can work with residents to integrate the net-zero carbon agenda into day-to-day service that delivers on sustainability and satisfaction.

# Motivation and Engagement

“You can’t talk about how heating our homes helps meet the net-zero carbon target in isolation – you have to put it in a wider climate and sustainability context.”

Resident and stakeholders showed there is a clear need to frame low carbon housing within the wider narrative of climate change. Conversations regularly moved away from green homes to other ways in which carbon emissions can be reduced, such as recycling, electric cars, and reducing plastic use. Examples of poor recycling strategies from local authorities showed a contradiction for participants – why is there so much disruption planned in my home when we can’t even get our recycling right yet?

Residents’ ability to highlight various contradictions and inconsistencies in decarbonisation strategies will have implications for social landlords. For instance, some participants noted that the private housing sector does not seem to be prioritising low carbon homes. “The new-build private housing over the road are still fitting gas boilers and that’s because they know this new technology isn’t cost effective.” This led to questioning over whether they or their social landlords would later end up footing the bill for upgrading gas heating to new technology. People also questioned if the net-zero carbon target was achievable if only social landlords were taking up the challenge.

All participants understood that lowering carbon emissions would require wholesale changes. This means we need a place-based approach to sustainability that extends beyond their landlord and the heating system in their homes. Social landlords can demonstrate their commitment to the net-zero agenda through their wider business strategy by investing in more green space, sustainable vehicle fleets and creating low-carbon office space.

Graham Lock from Low Carbon Homes emphasised the effectiveness of working with local authorities and local stakeholders to demonstrate a place-centred approach and commitment to net-zero-carbon. He said, “By working with everyone in an area, you can bring whole communities with you on the journey to sustainability.” Partnership work between social landlords and local council is key to developing trust from residents.

## Messaging that highlights saving on bills will resonate with most people

All participants agreed that saving money on their utility bills would be a key benefit to low carbon technology in their homes, and if it also reduced carbon emissions this was an added benefit. “I would welcome a new heating system that would give me lower bills and would be good for the planet”.

The other benefit of focusing on money saved is that it is a clear and measurable benefit that applies to everyone regardless of their starting point. Some participants in our resident sessions already lived in eco-friendly houses, so they were able to confirm how much money they save on energy bills. For instance, one participant told the group how having new insulation fitted to her home had saved her £400 over one winter. This is a compelling benefit to retrofitting and all participants agreed that this is the type of information they would like to see their social landlord provide.

However, some participants were sceptical of whether new technology, such as air pumps, would be cheaper to run. Lack of familiarity with the technology meant people were unsure of their cost. Another participant questioned whether the cost of installation would result in increased rent. “If I’m saving £200 a year from my energy bills but my rent goes up £50 a month, then that’s no good to me.”

In addition, a number of people explained that they never switch their heating on so there is no financial benefit to a new heating system. There were two main reasons why people would not use their heating: they could not afford their heating bills or they lived in an apartment building which was well insulated and if their neighbours had their heating on their home would also be warm.

Engaging with residents who do not use their heating will be especially difficult, but stakeholders said that the first step was explaining to them how much less energy a heat pump would use compared to traditional heating system, so that they may be able to use it and have a warmer home in the cold weather.

## Don't talk about 'Fuel Poverty'

Various stakeholders agreed that campaigns that focused on fuel poverty had failed to engage residents. Although everyone wants to save money on their energy bills, most people don't think of themselves as being in poverty, let alone fuel poverty. Marketing based around a notion of poverty will not promote engagement on a large scale. Placing too much emphasis on poverty will also discourage residents who currently can afford to pay their bills, even if they would still greatly benefit from lower carbon homes and save money.

## 'Healthy homes', an alternative motivation?

Many of the stakeholders recognised that money is not always a significant motivation for residents. Why would you agree to significant disruption in your home when your heating works, and you have no problem paying your energy bills? Despite an increasing awareness of climate change and its impacts, many people are still not motivated to make individual sacrifices in the name of cutting carbon emissions.

Health and wellbeing may provide an effective alternative motivation that encourages large scale engagement. Our stakeholders suggested that 'healthy homes' are an underused talking point which has proved effective with many residents.

Jenny Brierly from The University of Sheffield spoke about how the health benefits of good ventilation in the home are not properly recognised and that net-zero carbon homes can significantly improve the air quality within your home. The importance of good ventilation within buildings has become more of a focus as a result of Covid 19 and there is an opportunity to start engaging with residents on these terms.

No participants in the resident roundtables raised concerns with how their current heating system affects their health, further emphasising the fact that this has been an underused narrative when engaging people on low carbon housing. However, more work should be done to test this framing and narrative with people to see if it is effective.

# Communication

## Staff require significant further training on net-zero carbon

Stakeholders were pleased that net-zero carbon is starting to be prioritised within social landlords. In general, stakeholders shared the view that too often sustainability teams have been left to work in isolation from the rest of their organisation. As a result, decarbonisation is not often seen as a priority for most staff. Earning trust with residents is a multi-faceted challenge which can be seriously undermined by poor communication from staff members who haven't been trained in carbon literacy.

Engagement and training cannot start and finish with residents. It is imperative that social housing staff have a foundational knowledge about the net-zero carbon target and the role heating homes plays in meeting it. Many people reflected that messaging about eco retrofit will be most effective when promoted by neighbourhood and repair staff who are in regular contact with residents. The best time to speak about energy efficiency will often be during a gas safety check or after other planned improvement work. Therefore, it is important that all customer facing staff are knowledgeable about green technology.

We know that staff want the best for residents. If they fully understand the benefits of a low carbon house, then engagement with residents becomes a whole organisation effort. Internal training and communications should be provided throughout the organisation, so every team understands net-zero carbon and how they help to contribute to meeting the target within their role.

## Social landlords will have to answer a lot of questions

As decarbonisation moves up the housing sector's agenda, we can expect the scrutiny and questioning from residents to increase. Despite residents being willing and ready to engage with their landlord on net-zero-carbon there is a lot of uncertainty around what this entails. The resident sessions demonstrated that knowledge of low carbon technology is limited and inconsistent. Very few residents were familiar with air source heat pumps and how they work. Social landlords should aim to provide resources and communications that ensure all residents have a base-level understanding of the technology they propose to use.



Many stakeholders raised the importance of dedicated customer liaison officers in successful projects. Officers who have an expertise in low carbon housing with a specific remit of engaging with residents throughout are invaluable. Murray MacDonald from Lincolnshire Housing Partnership explained that before hiring liaison officers, the engineers and technical teams were not explaining how to use technology effectively. Technical jargon and overcomplication would confuse residents and leave technology unused. In contrast, resident engagement specialists can bring residents on the journey from initial engagement to installation and beyond.

***"The biggest investment we made was three tenant liaison officers, but it was a bargain compared to the cost of getting it wrong."***

Residents also want to understand their housing association's long-term strategy for net-zero carbon. A number of residents were aware that some homes will never meet Energy Performance Certificate rating C; referring to the target for social housing providers to attain a C rating on EPCs by 2035. In each of our resident sessions someone asked outright "Does this mean that these homes will be disposed of?" This is a really difficult question that many social landlords are currently considering and will need to be ready to answer.

Another effective way to build trust with residents would be for social landlords to produce a roadmap for how they can expect to reach net-zero carbon by 2050. Setting out the 30-year journey and the steps along with way, including how the social landlords intends to work with residents throughout would provide much more certainty and a framework for further engagement. Ideally, this roadmap would be linked to one provided by the Government to show how the nation will reach net zero by 2050.

## Social landlords are trusted by residents

Most participants trusted their landlord to provide them with the required information. Social landlords were often named by participants as the most trustworthy source for information, above both local authority and government.

The resident sessions demonstrated that people are comfortable communicating and working with their social landlord. Most participants felt that their opinion is taken into consideration and can influence their social landlords' ways of working.

Some participants saw these sessions as an opportunity to educate themselves and understand more about the challenges of achieving net-zero carbon. By doing so they would be able to scrutinise and contribute to plans for their neighbourhood.

The trust and respect that social landlords have developed with residents is an important tool in achieving net-zero carbon. As a trusted institution, the information they provide will be valued and can offer a platform to residents to contribute to decarbonisation in the place they live.

## Case studies and resident endorsement are vital

Although most people trust their social landlords, testimonies from people who have experience of living in a low carbon home will add huge value to resident engagement. Residents who act as ambassadors for retrofits or eco homes can build trust in a scheme by discussing the money they have saved, the effectiveness of the technology and the comfort of their new home.

Some of the residents at the roundtables already lived in low carbon housing and it was evident that they were able to provide a level of insight that the social landlord could not. Residents can honestly say whether retrofits are worth the disruption. Staff members may not mention that lofts cannot be used for storage or pictures cannot be hung on certain walls (as it may puncture the insulation). One participant, Linda, was able to provide this information and confirm that the benefits still outweighed the inconveniences.

Not only were residents such as Linda able to answer questions on the reality of living in low carbon housing, this level of personal testimony generated a real enthusiasm for low carbon housing amongst other residents.



# Trust

## Quality of service matters

As ever, a social landlord's relationship with their residents is underpinned by trust. The journey to 2050 will require decarbonisation and sustainability to be fully integrated within their core aims and daily practices.

A minority of residents expressed a lack of trust in their social landlord to complete any large-scale investment works. One participant argued: **"If they can't repair my front door on time, why would they be able to retrofit my whole house properly."**

Current customer satisfaction and the landlords' perceived track record on repairs and other services will greatly impact on their ability to gain their residents' trust that they can successfully retrofit their homes.

## Whole house approach

Residents were very keen for social landlords to demonstrate a comprehensive approach to achieving net-zero-carbon. They did not want the approach to be piecemeal. For instance, if a new heating system is installed, people felt very strongly that the insulation should also be improved.

The stakeholder roundtable reflected this view. Jade Lewis from Sustainable Energy Association spoke about how heat pumps are at their most effective when the insulation is good. If residents have better insulated homes, then they will use less energy. Jade emphasised the need for retrofits to be thought through from start to finish and advocated for the role of 'whole house retrofit coordinators' to ensure that work is done systematically and thoroughly.

The ongoing building safety agenda provides a real opportunity for social landlords to consider retrofits as part of wider building safety work.

Whole house retrofits have the benefit of delivering big results for residents, both in comfort and cost. As we have shown from the resident testimonies, when people are pleased with the product they will recommend and support its rollout. A whole house approach is an opportunity to maximise both the benefits for the resident and the goodwill these projects can generate.

## Mainstreaming the technology

One of the reasons why staff have not been able to promote sustainable technology and residents are not familiar with it is because it hasn't been prevalent within their organisations and their homes. Historically, low carbon technology has been used infrequently as part of trials and pilots. Maintenance teams have understandably favoured standard products which are universally used, require little input from users and have spare parts that are widely available. If low carbon technology is only infrequently trialled, then technical teams are not going to build the trust and understanding to promote its use widely. Stakeholders argued for the mainstreaming of this technology in organisations now, so employees become familiar with it.

The call for mainstreaming low carbon technology is as much an ask of Government as it is senior leadership teams. Gail Teasdale, CEO of Broadacres Housing argued that air source heat pumps need the same support that has benefitted wind energy, and that subsidising the market is the quickest way to rolling out this technology widely.



# Conclusion

The aim for all housing providers, individually and collectively, should be to create a decarbonisation programme in which residents are actively engaged. This will require a workforce who are engaged and energy literate, technology that is trusted, widely used, and has clear benefits for the user.

The recommendations stated below have been based off the key themes and findings from our roundtable and are important steps in ensuring that residents are fully engaged with the journey to net-zero carbon.

As the journey to net-zero carbon progresses it is crucial that the social housing sector continues to work together, sharing work and learning from each other. PlaceShapers and Tpas are committed to supporting social landlords to implement these recommendations and continue the work of putting the resident voice at the centre of the net-zero carbon agenda.

## Recommendations

### 1. The social housing sector should work collaboratively to develop clear communications advice for landlords. This should include:

- Developing tried and trusted messaging that landlords can use. Our groups provided a number of very useful insights into how best to communicate with residents on why upgrading their heating system is beneficial: saving money, providing 'healthy homes', helping reduce climate change. But there isn't a clear, tested message that social landlords can use. The social housing sector should fund further communications research with a representative cross section of residents from across the country to test key messages and phrases which can help residents to understand the benefits of new heating systems to them and how they help meet the net-zero carbon target.
- Developing a bank of case study examples of people who have had positive experiences of retrofit and who are saving money on bills by living in low carbon homes.
- Drafting a high-level road-map which individual associations can adapt and use which shows how the sector will meet the 2050 target.
- Recruiting resident ambassadors who can talk honestly about the pros and cons of the new technology to other residents and communities.

- Engaging with local authority leaders and bodies such as the Local Government Association to develop plans for cohesive local sustainability strategies with associated communications plans.

### 2. The Government must start now to deliver information and awareness campaigns that provide the context for social landlords' work. Work delivered by the social housing sector is vital, but it must be supported by wider communications from all stakeholders including government. It will be far harder to engage residents with the retrofits needed in their homes unless they can see how it fits into the roadmap to the nation's net-zero carbon target.

The UN Climate Change Conference to be held in Glasgow later this year is an ideal opportunity to launch this campaign and demonstrate how we can decarbonise housing across the country.

### 3. There are a number of practical, immediate steps social landlords can consider now:

- Demonstrate commitment to the net-zero agenda through their wider business strategy by investing in more green space, sustainable vehicle fleets and creating low-carbon office space.
- Where possible social landlords should aim for whole house retrofits. Residents showed a clear desire for a co-ordinated whole house approach. This will ensure the home is energy efficient and comfortable. Residents who are completely satisfied in their low carbon home will be more likely to recommend the process to neighbours and friends. Some retrofit measures, such as insulation, are popular and sought after by most residents. Combining retrofit methods that are popular with lesser known technology, such as air source heat pumps, can generate goodwill and create demand from residents.
- Dedicated and trained customer liaison officers should be appointed to co-ordinate engagement campaigns and managing retrofits. An individual who acts as a point of contact for residents from the start to end of the project will provide reassurance for residents.
- Internal training and communications campaigns are crucial. Residents will want as much information as possible regarding their homes, mixed messages or lack of knowledge can undermine resident engagement. Promoting and explaining the benefits of low carbon housing should be done whenever possible, carbon literate staff means engagement can happen organically during home visits and everyday repairs.