

Action 21
Limited Company no 4150006 (not-for-profit)

Chair's Report 2009

Introduction

Action 21 was incorporated in 2001 as a not for profit limited company. Since then the company has developed as a social enterprise with a clear vision to enable local communities to take practical steps to address ongoing environmental challenges. The company has become prominent as a committed local social enterprise, employing its own staff, and engaging with a wide range of volunteers and groups to move the environmental agenda forwards in the area. The company still counts on support from the local district and county councils as part of their continuing commitment to Agenda 21. This report details some of our achievements in the past year and our future plans.

ENERGY

Solar 300 Challenge

This is a project that has grown out of the Renewable Energy Club. Launched in May 2009, the project aims to bring affordable solar water heating to the residents of Warwick District. Action 21 is working in partnership with supplier Eco2solar, local firm Encraft and the South Warwickshire Credit Union. There has been a lot of interest in this project, from the local newspapers and amongst the public. The first six installation projects are now in progress.

Sydenham Community Insulation Project

Spearheaded by the Energy Group in partnership with the Sydni Centre, Encraft and Warwickshire Act on Energy, this is a project addressing the twin issues of energy efficiency and fuel poverty. The project seeks to engage with the community in Sydenham, reaching across language barriers and multiple deprivations, in order to insulate hard-to-insulate homes, reduce high fuel bills and lift households out of fuel poverty as well as helping people to take action to mitigate against climate change, peak oil and resource depletion. The SCIP has received sufficient funding for this project to progress.

Leam Hydro Project

Action 21 is working together with Encraft to complete a feasibility study into installing turbines in the Leam at the Mill Bridge and at Princes Drive, in collaboration with Transition Town Leamington and Warwick District Council. A specially set up community ESCO (Energy Services COmpany) will provide the funding for the project which has the potential to generate 164MWhr/yr, with a payback period of 10 years.

FOOD

Food Projects

Whilst in the past our work on Food and Allotments has been focused in Lillington, we are now in the process of expanding our reach, establishing food co-ops in Warwick and Sydenham, and also a community allotment at Dobson Lane.

During 2008/9 we received funding for the Community Food Project work from the Food Standards Agency and Warwick Children's Centres. We worked in partnership with the Children's Centre in Lillington and with Bath Place Community Venture.

RE-USE

Recycle Warehouse

The Recycle Warehouse has been operating seven days a week since the end of 2007/8. This has meant that we have increased our turnover, both in terms of the weight of goods diverted from landfill (which is a key objective) and in financial terms. We have also been able to expand the very committed team of volunteers who run the shop. March 2009 was our best month yet, with around 16,000 kg of goods diverted from landfill. Funds generated by the shop have been used to support not only our recycling programmes but also our other programmes where the money has made a real difference. We have also been able to increase our revenue and to divert more goods from landfill through online sales.

In fact, our re-use programme has been so successful that, in May 2009, we were able to open our second Re-use shop in Sydenham.

"Taking practical steps to reduce our environmental footprint"

The Leamington Peace Festival continues to be a major event in Action 21's calendar. We work with the Festival organisers to make it easier for visitors to sort their rubbish for recycling. Our volunteers worked tremendously hard, collecting and sorting over 1.8 tonnes of recycling. The success of our operations at the Peace Festival has meant that we have been contacted by the organisers of other festivals to run recycling at their events. We are looking forward to expanding our recycling facilitation.

EDUCATION

Schools Work and Green Champions

Action 21 continues to have a key role in organising the annual '200X & Beyond' events for local school children. Building on the success of '2008 & Beyond', this year's '2009 & Beyond' was an all-round success, with teachers commenting particularly on how well organised and informative the event was.

Our number of Green Champions, volunteers recruited to specifically deliver the message about the need to live more sustainably, continues to increase. In 2008/2009 the Green Champions have been involved with public-facing events such as the Peace Festival and Royal Show. We are still finding the best way to work with them but we are sure that this is a positive way to engage volunteers in working with the community.

Other Events

We were approached this year by the organisers of the Royal Show at Stoneleigh to have a display space at their last ever show. We used this event to raise awareness of Action 21's activities with a wide section of the general public. Similarly, we used our involvement in a screening of 'The Age of Stupid' at the Royal Cinema in April to engage with the people of Leamington.

PARTNERSHIPS

Rick Smith, Action 21's General Manager is now the vice chair of SPAN (the Sustainable Partnerships Action Network). The Network is currently pursuing several partnership funding bids.

Action 21 is continuing to support the Leamington Transition Town initiative. The group was successful in establishing Leamington as a transition town, and is now discussing how to bring forward the relationship between Action 21 and Leamington Transition Town.

In the spring of 2009 Action 21 agreed an affinity partnership with Garden Organic, allowing both partners to work together to increase membership. Affinity partnerships continue to exist between Action 21 and the green energy suppliers Ecotricity and Good Energy.

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

Action 21 is taking advantage of online communications with our new Twitter page and Facebook group to increase our public engagement. We have over 80 people following our activities on Twitter, with 'tweets' ranging from announcements of events to information on Peak Oil.

THE FUTURE

Our communities, and society as a whole, face serious challenges in the coming years- the two greatest threats facing us are resource depletion and pollution. Action 21 through its practical programmes is well placed to help our communities work towards self-reliance and resilience in response to this. We will continue to promote practical sustainable solutions for recycling, local food production, local energy conservation and generation as well as sustainable transport solutions. We will not do this alone but by working together with people, with local groups, with communities and with the local councils. I invite you all to get involved and help a sustainable future to come about.

Gareth Davies, Chair, Action 21, 16th July 2009