

Incentives and information for the public

Leicester (UK)

GENERAL ASPECTS

Leicester is the largest district in the county of Leicestershire, which comprises nine districts. In 1999, Leicester had 294,000 inhabitants and was home to the largest Asian community in the country. A former Roman town, before being ruled by the Danish invaders, Leicester is situated at the crossroads of the main axes of communication, in the centre of England. Historically, industry was a major force in Leicester. Today, most activity (62%) takes place within the tertiary sector. The most important activities are: public administration, textiles, small-scale distribution, service companies, health, leisure.



CONTEXT

Leicester's energy and sustainable development policy

On becoming "Britain's first Environment City" in 1990, Leicester committed itself to a process of local sustainable development, based on cooperation between different local contributors. This cooperation materialised through the involvement of the LECT - Leicester Environment City Trust, an organisation that promotes discussion, research and consultation, which is composed of 8 working groups that focus on specific areas, including that of energy, and which brings together representatives from the public and private sectors, associations, universities and independent experts. This has enabled specific strategies for the city to be developed and outlined in an action plan.

The municipal energy policy aims to reduce energy consumption by the year 2025 to half that of 1990, and to ensure that 20% of all energy used is derived from renewable sources by 2020. In order to achieve this objective, the energy action plan makes recommendations for initiatives in the fields of cogeneration, renewable energy, waste, transport and energy efficiency, for example in the domestic sector. The economic and social dimensions of the energy policy have been reinforced by the adoption of a Local Agenda 21 "Blueprint for Leicester", and subsequently the Leicester Community Plan 2001-2003, which proposed initiatives to complement those already in place.

Measures implemented

For the production of electricity, the city council has installed a number of small units that run on gas, which supply council leisure centres and other buildings. A waste-to-energy scheme and passive solar projects are still on the drawing board.

Measures to improve energy efficiency involve all sectors: municipal, domestic and industrial.

In the municipal sector, these measures take above all the form of energy audits of council housing, so that future steps can be prioritised, the integration of energy efficiency objectives into the planning of new housing, and the reinvestment of savings made in initiatives to improve energy efficiency. The enhancement of energy efficiency for private housing has been achieved in the following ways:

- The "Home Energy Strategy" programme, which included training for professionals working in the building industry, the financing of initial energy efficiency audits for housing, advice for private individuals

on work to be carried out and the use of trained professionals, provided by the local energy agency and a campaign entitled "Save Energy at Home", and the subsidising of work,

- Defining energy efficiency standards for new housing,
- Informing the public and raising their awareness of energy efficiency measures and protecting the environment.

The industrial sector is essentially the focus of information and communication initiatives implemented by various organisations:

- For large companies, the "Leicester Energy and Environment Group" created by the national energy efficiency office in each region,
- For SME/SMI's, local organisations, such as the Leicester energy agency. It operates a mobile conference centre, the "Energy User Cruiser", in cooperation with the national energy agency ETSU and the financing of the "Energy Efficiency Best Practice" programme. Initially intended as a means of publishing the results of the national programme and providing training for managers of SME's and SMI's in the field of energy management, the "Energy User Cruiser" aims to adopt a "bottom-up" approach and provides training for employees.

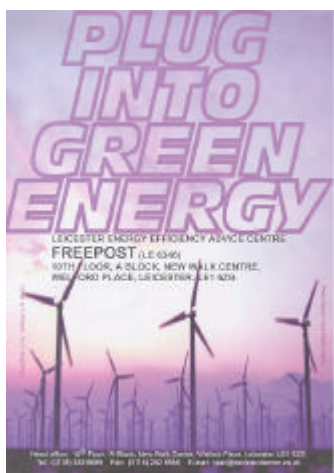
THE EXPERIENCE OF LEICESTER

The partners working with the council to raise public awareness

Most of these measures are implemented by means of partnerships involving the public and private sectors, for example a number of organisations specialised in the field of information and public awareness raising. Their work is often interdependent and shares a common aim.

The principal organisations are:

- The "Leicester Energy Agency" (LEA), created in 1996 with the support of the European Commission as part of the SAVE II programme, in partnership with Leicester City Council and The Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development at the Montfort University; the wider public and small and medium-sized companies are its essential target audience,
- The "Energy Efficiency Centre" has been open since 1998 and is one of 43 centres in the UK that are supported by the "Energy Saving Trust" to promote the national "Energy Efficiency Campaign", which aims to involve the public and to raise its awareness of energy efficiency issues,
- The "Leicester Energy Efficiency Advice Centre", established in 1998 in the town centre, with the help of the LEA to act as a showcase for its work, is open to the public and any companies wishing to obtain information concerning energy efficiency, renewable energy, good practice and the deregulation of the energy market,
- "Environ", a charitable organisation whose aim is to contribute to sustainable development, provides information and practical advice in all fields linked to the environment for the wider public and companies, in order to encourage them to take action.



Awareness-raising initiatives aimed at private individuals have the objective of:

- Combating fuel poverty, a serious problem in the United Kingdom,
- Reducing pollution linked to energy consumption,
- Reducing the cost of energy and promoting savings in energy consumption, thus contributing to enhancement of the local economy.

"Plug into green energy"

The "Energy Efficiency Centre" has taken advantage of the liberalisation of the energy market to educate consumers, who are now able to choose their own energy provider. The "Plug into Green Energy" campaign aims to draw attention to the freedom and independence of each sector to choose the source of energy and its suppliers. This campaign is above all an opportunity to communicate an essential message: the cheapest energy is energy that is used sensibly.

In order to follow up this campaign, the centre provides members of the

public with a guide to help them select the gas or electricity company that best suits their needs; information on clean electricity from renewable sources is also available.

Home energy check: a starting point for a series of advice initiatives for private individuals

The "Leicestershire / Northants Energy Efficiency Centre and Energy Agency" (LNEECEA) provides interested individuals, who wish to improve the energy efficiency of their home, with a "Home Energy Check" questionnaire, which is available for free at the "Leicester Energy Efficiency Advice Centre" and on the internet. On this basis, the LNEECEA provides individual advice tailored to suit the needs identified in the questionnaire. This advice relates to:

- Sources of funding for investments in energy improvements; and also, how to secure subsidies in order to combat fuel poverty,
- Low energy consumption appliances,
- Tried and tested companies able to carry out improvements,
- The use of clean and renewable energy.

Some low energy consumption devices are sold very reasonably at cost price at the Advice Centre, for example, power points for refrigerators, heat reflectors for radiators, and low-energy lamps. These lamps are manufactured in a local factory, whose development was supported by the Leicester agency.

All these appliances and the services available are shown on the website <http://www.energy-advice.co.uk>



Energy sense: integrated promotion of the local experience

In partnership with the Leicester Energy Agency and Montfort University, and with the support of the SAVE II programme, the City Council Housing department has developed a consultancy service that is aimed at homeowners and encourages them to invest in order to save energy. This service enables the council's Home Energy Strategy to be implemented and adapted as necessary. It promotes advice provided by the agency and provides complementary training. This initiative also aims to develop a market for all technologies and services that save energy. In order to achieve this, any companies that produce materials and equipment, installation engineers and sales representatives are invited to become, free of charge, Energy Sense partners. From these partners, customers can obtain a reduction by showing their "Energy Sense" card. Companies must also provide simple and detailed information concerning all their products and services that are included in this initiative. Details of services offered are available on the Internet at:

<http://www.energy-advice.co.uk>

Eco-house

In 1989/90, 'Environ', with the support of Leicester City Council, developed an ecological model house, by renovating a detached house originally built in the 1930's. In 2000, new developments were completed with National Lottery funding and subsidised by the European Union Urban Programme and more than 100 companies.

The Eco-house serves as a permanent "in situ" exhibition, with environment-friendly installations and materials, in order to encourage and inspire visitors to change their homes and their habits. It shows how the combination of rational use of energy and renewable energy can help to reduce the impact that a house has on the environment, whilst reducing energy consumption.

The house introduces visitors to different developments that make it possible to save energy – and therefore money, together with photovoltaic solar panels and a wind turbine for the production of electricity and hot water. Schools can arrange guided tours of the Eco-house and private individuals are provided with a free audio-guide during their visit and can use the computers provided in each room to obtain more detailed information concerning the products on display, to play games or to see a video presentation on the construction of the Eco-house. Qualified staff are available to provide information and follow-up advice and visitors are invited to complete the "Home energy check" questionnaire before they leave. An organic garden, a café-restaurant and an ecological shop, where original items are very likely to arouse visitors' curiosity, complete the service provided by the Eco-house. The Eco-house shop is linked to the "Ark Environment Centre": situated in the town centre, this is a larger ecological shop and also a vegetarian restaurant.

Schools, community groups, companies and clubs can hire the conference suite for their conferences and seminars. The subject of such meetings does not necessarily have to be connected with the environment, but this represents an additional opportunity to raise the awareness of a target group concerning sustainable development and possible initiatives.

Turning the Tide

The Turning the Tide campaign, originally developed in Leicester to overcome the lack of information concerning environmental questions, has continued and has taken on a regional dimension in the East Midlands. It is based on the successful partnership involving the local authorities of Leicester, Nottingham and Derby, the regional and local media, the environment agency, a regional water company and Environ.

Its aim is to combat 4 major obstacles that can prevent people from taking action in order to protect the environment: the costs involved (an obstacle or a stimulus for change), feasibility / practical aspects, information and motivation, and the values used to evaluate costs and the feasibility of an initiative.

Under the generic title of "Turning the Tide", theme-based campaigns lasting one month are regularly organised to inform people of the environmental problems that affect them directly and to encourage them to do something simple and practical/tangible to improve their quality of life and the environment. Topics such as water, energy, clean transport and recycling have been tackled.

Each campaign appeals to a wide range of local and regional media, including some that are partners in the initiative, such as regional BBC television and radio stations, in order to provide publicity for the campaign and to communicate its message to a wider public. Brochures and posters serve to complement the slogans featured in the media, by providing more detailed information. Promotional offers or subsidies are introduced to reduce the cost barrier and promote simple and practical initiatives. During the energy campaign, it was possible to purchase panels that reflect the heat produced by radiators at cost price and 30,000 of these were sold. The individual benefits to be gained from participating in the initiative, together with the benefits to the environment, are emphasised in order to motivate the public.

Very simple telephone surveys have provided an opportunity to follow up and evaluate the impact of the campaign in terms of awareness raising and show that "Turning the Tide" is becoming increasingly well-known. This shows how effective it can be to use the same well-known name for a series of different theme-based campaigns. Moreover, the offers and subsidies make it possible to assess the immediate outcomes.

On the basis of a message and offers that are common to the three cities, each city has the opportunity to promote the activities that it has developed and the opportunities that exist for new initiatives. For example, Leicestershire has forged links with additional partners, such as the Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In 2001, the "Turning the Tide" initiative combined forces with the "Making News" project to develop awareness raising campaigns concerning the problems that people themselves consider important.

<http://www.environ.org.uk/aboutenviron/education/turningthetide.htm>

Solar club

Developed by LNEECEA and Environ, the "Solar club" brings together experts that provide private individuals with training in the installation of solar water-heating systems. The club also provides them with access to preferential terms for the purchase of solar panels.

<http://www.environ.org.uk/aboutenviron/energy/solarclubs.htm>

Energy Advocates

Environ also provides free training for private individuals on a wide variety of issues relating to energy. Ten hours of training, divided between five afternoon sessions at the Eco-house, are devoted to questions of heating, lighting, insulation and the subsidies available. In addition to this, one-day introductory sessions on the problems of energy conservation are also organised. These "Energy Advocates" are therefore able to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and are encouraged to provide their families with practical information. Since September 1999, 50 people have been trained in this way and 450 others have been provided with advice. The project is supported by the National Lottery Charities Board and the Transco Affordable Warmth Programme.

<http://www.environ.org.uk/aboutenviron/education/energyadvocates.htm>

People living in depressed area of Leicester have been provided with training by means of the "Energy Advocates" project. They have made an important contribution, along with religious and community groups, in order to help the local people to save energy as part of the "Fuel for thought" project.

<http://www.environ.org.uk/aboutenviron/energy/fuelforthought.htm>

EVALUATION

The City of Leicester has clearly understood the importance of information and raising public awareness. A number of organisations that are specialists in this field are working with a coordinated approach and in partnership with Leicester City Council and private companies. In addition to isolated awareness raising campaigns, they are able at all times to provide practical advice that is adapted to the needs of private individuals and training in the use of energy-efficient or clean technologies; they provide people with access to suitable equipment at reasonable prices.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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