

# Green Homes Sheffield

## Spring 2014 Evaluation Report



GREEN  
OPEN  
HOMES





# Green Homes Sheffield

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Green Homes Sheffield ran our inaugural open homes event in spring 2014, supported by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) via the Green Open Homes national network. See summary on page 3.

We initiated our network with the participation of 17 host homes and 25 other volunteers and ran 10 days of open home events during April and May, attracting over 200 individual visitors. See page 4.

We collected feedback from our attendees and hosts. See feedback evaluation on pages 5 - 8.

We have developed our network through links to businesses, social enterprises and communities, and built a successful website and social media following.

We have established links with media organisations and retrofit businesses to publicise 'Who Can Help?' with eco-retrofit in Sheffield. See pages 8-9.

We have learnt from our first round of openings and we will go on to offer more open home events, training, learning and peer support. See page 11.

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## Who we are

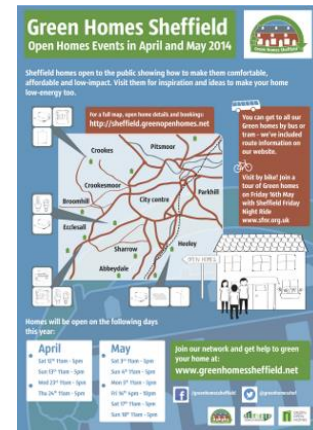
Green Homes Sheffield is a network to help homeowners make their homes more comfortable, affordable and energy-efficient, through eco-retrofit. The organisation was formed in late 2013 by a team of volunteers, all with some involvement in energy improvement of existing homes – as consultants, installers, advisers, students, homeowners and community project leaders. We successfully secured funding from the national Green Open Homes network to develop our network and run open home events across Sheffield.

## What we have achieved

We set a target to have 20 open homes, to attract 200 visitors and to collect feedback from the events to enable us to improve what we do. We have collected and evaluated feedback from visitors, hosts and volunteers. We attended 4 network events - a Transition Cafe evening, a church open evening for environmental projects, the celebration event for Sheffield University's Big Energy Upgrade project, and a skill-sharing session on energy at home. We appeared 3 times on Sheffield Live! community radio, and were featured in our local paper and 'Now Then' independent magazine. Our new website had 3,800 visits to the end of May.

Our open home season in Sheffield recruited and supported 17 homeowners who have made low carbon improvements to their homes, and enabled them to open their home to visitors, over 10 days in spring 2014. The aim of the events was to give hosts an opportunity to show their low carbon improvements and share their experiences, to enable visitors to learn about how to address eco-retrofit themselves. Our host homes were open for a total of 41 days and attracted 209 visitors, with 13 volunteers helping as 'welcomers'.

Green Homes Sheffield's open homes events were enjoyed by attendees and hosts, who showed interest in taking part again. Feedback shows that attendees found the events informative and appreciated "the hosts' generosity in passing on their knowledge". Hosts appreciated how "people found it interesting and useful to look at the work we've done, even though it is by no means complete or perfect in all respects!" Attendees found it particularly useful seeing "practical examples of what could be done in a home just like our own". Postcard invitations to neighbours proved a good marketing strategy, and some felt the events "are developing a community".



*Green Homes Sheffield poster*



*Article in Sheffield Telegraph*

## Where we go from here

After these successful events, Green Homes Sheffield want to run another season. Next time we will consider more focus on the groups of open homes in specific neighbourhoods, working more with local community associations on publicity. We would also like to try out different types of event including skill-sharing sessions. We would like to boost our presence in mainstream media as well as building on our success with social media. We would like our website to become a hub of information for homeowners and enable knowledge sharing.





## Our open homes events

Our open home events recruited 18 hosts spread over the city of Sheffield, of which 16 offered open homes, one offered external viewing of solid wall insulation, and one was unfortunately unable to participate due to health problems. The events took place in four blocks: 12 and 13 April, 23 and 24 April, 3, 4, 5 May, and 16, 17, 18 May. We recruited 12 volunteer welcomers and were able to provide a welcomer for all hosts who requested one. We also had substantial help from 4 longer-term volunteers with taking photos, populating our website with profiles and bookable events and using social media, and one of these volunteers was taken on as a paid Intern for 100 hours to help with evaluation, through a University of Sheffield scheme. We ran a successful training workshop at the South Yorkshire Energy Centre (SYEC) for hosts and other volunteers, which included 'dry run' visits to 2 hosts. Our risk assessment procedure was successful and there were no accidents.



*Homes visited on the volunteer training day*

Hosts typically opened for two days, offering 2 or 3 tours per day at specific times, and had 4-9 visitors per tour. Based on bookings and feedback postcards, we estimate 170 unique visitors attended the open homes. In addition to this, 49 cyclists attended the 'Sheffield Friday Night Ride' on 16 May, touring up to 7 homes for short tours, giving a total of around 280 visits in one evening! The total visitor numbers thus exceeded the target of 200 we had set ourselves.

Short questionnaire cards provided by Green Open Homes (GOH) were distributed at each open homes event. The feedback data comes from the 119 visitor questionnaires completed. We followed up 40 willing visitors with more in-depth questionnaires by email - we had a low response rate here, but some interesting qualitative feedback which is quoted in this report. We also sought feedback from our hosts and volunteers which we have summarised. We filled gaps in the feedback postcards through follow-up

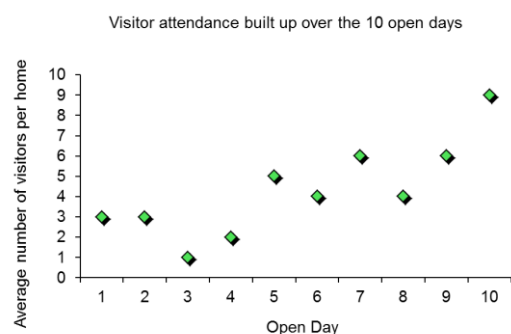
with hosts.



*A tour in the garden at Fireside housing co-operative*

### How did our events develop through April and May?

We chose to open over 10 days with the intention that publicity and attendance would build up during April and May, through both media exposure and word-of-mouth. This appears to have been successful, with the final open day average number of visitors per house standing at 9.

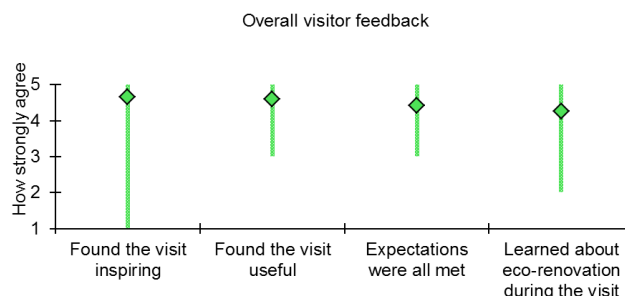


# Evaluation of feedback from visitors

To evaluate the impact of the Green Homes Sheffield events, we used feedback cards provided by Green Open Homes network to collect feedback on visitors' satisfaction with the event and intentions to make changes at home. We took web bookings using Eventbrite and have used these, and postcards, plus feedback from hosts to collate attendance figures.

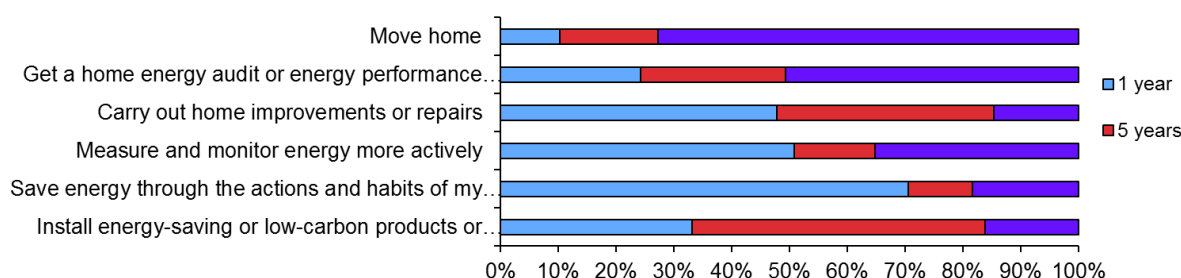
## How useful did visitors find the open homes events?

Overall, visitors found the open homes events inspiring, useful and educational. This graph shows ranges from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, and the average score.



## What plans do visitors have for eco-retrofit?

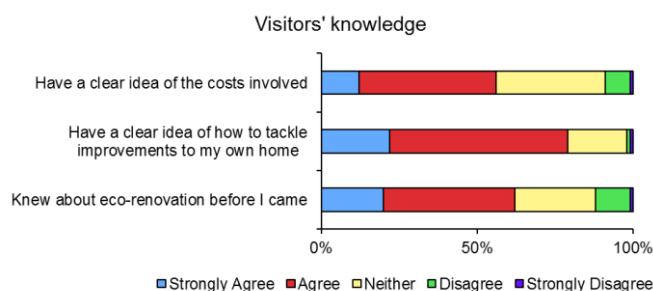
Visitors' plans for the future



Most attendees plan to save energy through changing their behaviour, and over 80% of them plan to install energy-saving or low carbon products or technologies in the next 1-5 years.

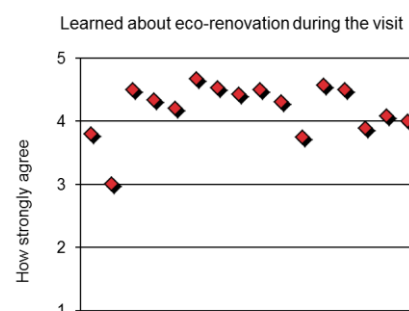
## What did the visitors know about eco-renovation already?

More than 60% knew about it already, and by the end of their visit, nearly 80% had a clear idea how to tackle improvements, and over 50% had a clear idea of the costs.



## How much did the visitors learn from their visit?

With an average rating of 4, visitors mostly 'Agreed' that they learned about eco-renovation during their visit. This graph shows how this varied amongst the homes that were open.



## What our open home hosts said

**We asked our hosts what they thought went really well** and they said that guests were 'interested', 'enthusiastic' and 'asked lots of questions. Tours seemed to be 'well received by visitors'.

Our hosts were largely very satisfied with the support they received in terms of information, volunteers and preparation. Hosts were satisfied with their volunteers and one who had declined originally thought afterwards that a volunteer would have been useful. Hosts suggested providing additional information, including up-to date info on new Green Deal initiatives, to help our network's role in disseminating information on retrofit.

The pattern of openings and timings of the tours, were said to be 'OK to fit in as a host'. There were some issues reported: we found that mid-week days were not as popular, and one host suggested that 'if we'd opened on more weekend dates we might have had more visitors'. It would help hosts if we could ensure higher attendance for fewer openings - perhaps by ensuring there are fewer timing clashes amongst homes that are open, or offering combined booking for tours of two or more homes.

**We asked hosts about what publicity seemed to work well**, but this was harder for them to assess. The postcards attracted neighbours, being the largest proportion of guests in one case, and frequently mentioned in feedback. Personal emails and word of mouth also proved successful, but did not attract as many attendees as we had hoped. Indeed, one host made the comment that 'I emailed a lot of people who I thought might be interested, but only a couple of them came'. For publicity, hosts liked the idea of 'a branded poster to put in the front window' and some hosts created their own using our leaflets.

Some visitors came who the hosts had not met before, indicating that publicity had worked. However, one host made the comment that 'a substantial proportion of the visitors (half?) were people I knew to be already part of what you might call the green circle of Sheffield... so I get the impression it hasn't reached far beyond those who are already keen/enlightened.' Another host agreed that attendance was often by friends and neighbours, and it 'would have been nice to see more people we did not know'.

We had less success than hoped in getting mainstream media coverage, but where we did, it seemed to really help. One host commented: 'It was notable that the first day was really busy and then subsequent days were very quiet', but generally attendance built up over the 10 open days. This suggests that the open homes events were becoming more talked about during April and May, albeit from a 'standing start' this time. We learnt that even more publicity would be worthwhile, especially a longer build-up and more presence in mainstream media and community magazines to reinforce the posters, emails, events, word of mouth and neighbour postcards. Attendance begets attendance when hosts mention other homes.



*A host shows glazing used at a home in Crookes*



*A tour views external insulation and triple glazing at Fireside housing co-operative*



*A host shows rainwater harvesting at a home in Nether Edge*

### **We asked hosts what they would do differently.**

- 'I'd suggest just having one open weekend every few months (maybe twice a year), with a bit of time between for spreading the word and generating interest in new people in the next event.'
- 'I think a really important angle that hasn't been fully explored yet is networking together the homes/hosts, so that they become a community. I'd have loved to have had more time to visit the other sites, but because I was at home running tours I didn't get chance, and few other hosts came to see me, so I do think this is a missing link for me at present.'
- 'I do wonder whether a more 'open house' approach would have attracted more people, but also think it would have been difficult to host random arrival times.'
- 'Next year (as a steering group) we'll be organised a little earlier in the season - we could get it into the Environment Weeks brochure.'
- 'I think we need to work on the publicity more, how can we find the sort of people who care about these types of improvements. I would like to understand why people who were interested chose not to come... So a bit more investigation on what are the barriers to people coming (was it having to book? timings of tours? low priority?) and what we can do about these.'
- 'Providing hosts access to their bookings online, enabling the host to contact attendees directly to negotiate rearranging a booking if necessary and to see the bookings as they're made.'

**We asked hosts if they were happy overall** - and they said yes. 'I felt I had enough visitors to make it worthwhile. It would have been even better to have more! It has also been fun working with other volunteers on the project, and inspiring to get ideas by visiting other eco-homes.'



*Visitors are shown the wind turbine at a home in Stannington*



*Discussing attic room insulation options at a home in Burngreave*



*A host leads a tour at a home in Stocksbridge*



## How we developed our network

Beyond running a successful open homes programme, our wider aim this spring was to establish a network which can continue to support householders into the future. Since the project started, Green Homes Sheffield has built up a team of over forty active individuals who have volunteered as hosts, welcomers, and on our steering group. Many of these volunteers helped with the organisation, planning and marketing of the spring events. We have also built a wider network of 118 contacts from eco-renovation suppliers, visitors and interested individuals who have signed up to our mailing list, and we have over 250 followers on Facebook and Twitter.

We have worked with different organisations to explore collaboration and partnership. From the outset we have worked closely with Meersbrook Green Triangle, and their Sheffield Hallam University supported 'Housewarming' project exploring how peer learning supports domestic retrofit, and we are now looking at how we could undertake joint funding bids. Similarly, the Green Impact Student Homes project at Sheffield University Student Union has offered strong support, including linking Green

Homes Sheffield to private landlords renting to students. We also have good links with Sheffield University's Solar Farm, and with Sheffield City Council's sustainable development team.



*Visitors view the attic room at one of the homes from the 'Housewarming project'*

### The retrofit companies we have linked with

Our steering group has from the start included active representation from Sustainable Building, an energy retrofit consultancy, and from EnergyJump, a renewables supplier supporting community energy initiatives. In addition, we have created an online database of 'Who Can Help?' with energy retrofit in Sheffield, to offer an ongoing repository of companies who have been helpful to members of our network.

We are approaching further retrofit businesses to request sponsorship of our website and activities, and have had favourable responses that will help to sustain our work. Members of the team will continue to make these partnerships, and crowd-funding has been suggested as another option for raising money to run more events.

### Social enterprises involved in our network

South Yorkshire Energy Centre at Heeley City Farm was among our founder members, and we are collaborating to share information and resources and make them available to different audiences. Similarly, David Garlovsky of Solar Active has been keen to support our work and his education sessions provided an invaluable grounding for some of our volunteers. Sheffield Renewables helped to generate the initial idea for Green Homes Sheffield and we retain close working ties.

Three social enterprises - SYEC, Green Directions and Greave House Farm - and three housing co-ops were active as hosts and, in some cases, steering group members, and have linked us in to their own networks.

Regather Co-operative acts as accountable body and host for Green Homes Sheffield, and has been a brilliant source of support for our web and visual image development, creating publicity materials and using web and social media tools.



## Communities we have collaborated with

Green Homes Sheffield has also made important links with Sheffield-based community groups. One particular success was the Sheffield Friday Night Ride ([www.SFNR.org.uk](http://www.SFNR.org.uk)) bike tour of several homes in one evening, which attracted 49 riders to tour Green Homes for 7 short tours and talks. SFNR are keen to continue to collaborate by organising a daytime tour of open homes during our next event.

We worked with Transition Sheffield (another active steering group member) to run a Transition Cafe event in March themed on Green Homes. This included a short film and a talk by our project worker, and attracted an audience keen to discuss eco-retrofit and learn from each other.

For future we are also exploring collaboration with other groups of green-minded people - Sheffield Environment Weeks, CamRA, U3A, Guides and Scouts or WI, for example. We also hope to link more with building professionals through the Federation of Master Builders and the AECB.



*Sheffield Friday Night Ride visitors discuss lifestyle changes with a host*

## Communities we publicised our work through

As well as distributing printed publicity and emails through all of the organisations mentioned above, we placed adverts in two local community magazines 'EDGE' and 'Burngreave Messenger' - with a longer run-up period there would be more scope for offering articles as well. We want to build better links with the neighbourhood groups which support such publications, and create a sense of a locally branded event, for

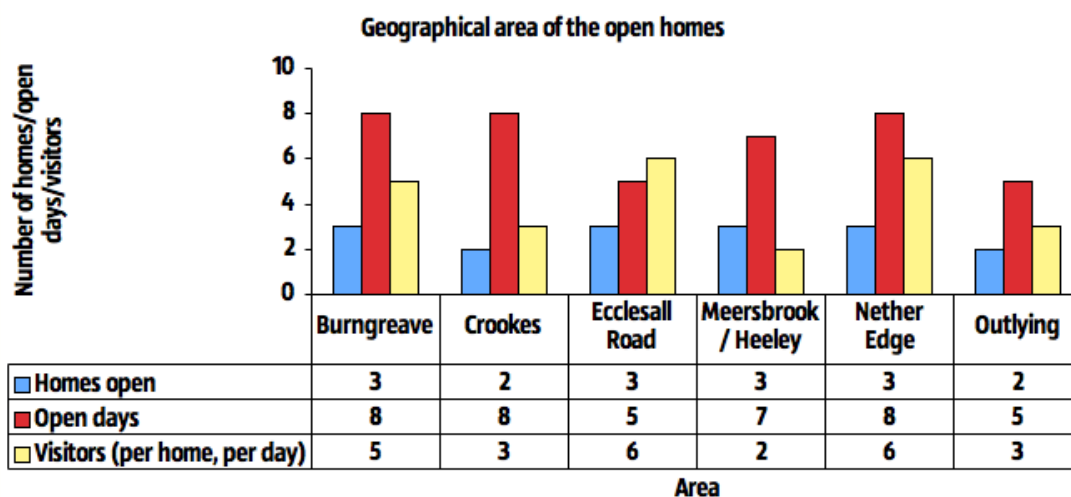
example 'Green Homes Sheffield in Burngreave', to maximise the impact of publicity through newsletters, noticeboards, personal invites and word of mouth.

In addition there are communities of interest which provide a good audience - we have targeted various University departments, church groups, and the Sustainability Group of Sheffield U3A. Green Homes Sheffield will continue to make links with further 'niche' groups, who are likely to be homeowners interested in eco-renovations.

The geographical area of the open homes was widespread in the City, in 5 different wards of the city, and two outlying areas.



*The SFNR look at an attic room insulation in Nether Edge*



## Our learning from Spring 2014

Green homes events are a promising setting for homeowners to share their knowledge and experiences of eco-renovations. The visitors reported high levels of satisfaction and knowledge gained from their visits and liked 'seeing practical examples of what can be done in a home like mine'. The hosts and volunteers agreed that 'it felt like a good learning experience all round'. We conclude we are enabling the attendees to gain valuable information for a moderate investment of their time. Our events also built up valuable connections among community partners.

Our new website enabled us to create blogs and post them via social media - this proved to be a useful marketing strategy and will now form a mainstay of communication across our network. We want to ensure that all online posts are high quality, and are widely shared, and find more ways for the public to engage and interact with our website content.



*A host talks to a tour about growing your own food*

### How did visitors hear about our events?

We have rated the success of our marketing strategies based on feedback received from 33 open home visitors. We plan to make improvements to our marketing strategy to increase the number of people who attend.

We achieved four community radio broadcasts and two printed articles, including in the Sheffield Telegraph. This is a good start and will be improved, hopefully including TV coverage, by an earlier build-up to the next season and the contacts we have now established. We plan to continue to target our marketing and publicity to 'homeowners who want to do something and to individuals with an existing interest in the environment'. We are looking at options to put attendees in touch with hosts to ask further questions. We particularly want to find approaches that build up contacts within neighbourhoods.

### What next?

Green Homes Sheffield will run another season, and aim for fewer but better attended open days. We are also well positioned to provide eco-renovation education in a variety of formats - for example through workshops, demonstrations, and network events for different audiences. This could include 'skill-sharing' or 'roadmap' sessions - e.g. "how to draught-proof", or "options for hot water systems". We want to continue to offer a learning experience that meets a range of participants' needs.

Existing resources can be utilized to inform educational programmes, including our links to: the South Yorkshire Energy Centre, Green Impact Student Homes, Transition Sheffield, Regather Co-operative, and the Green Building Forum.



## Thanks and contacts

Green Homes Sheffield would like to thank all of our volunteers and partner organisations. Special thanks to Regather Co-operative for acting as our host organisation, Green Open Homes for the supporting resources, and Bristol Green Doors for project mentoring.

Our Steering Group: Emma Bridge, Julian Briggs, Susannah Diamond, Isobelle Logan, Kiran Malhi-Bearn, Nick Parsons, Rob Samuelson, Rick Watson, Mark Wells

Other supporters: Jonathan Cook, Shelly Davis McDonald, Alistair Dempster, Jenny Fortune, David Garlovsky, Barney Harris, Mick Nott, Phil Parnham, Gareth Roberts, Sharon Smith, Andrew Wood

Project Worker: Jenny Patient

Intern (supported through Sheffield Internship Scheme): Grace Robinson

Volunteer Marketing and Information Assistants: 'Jasmine' Chong Wing To, Bethan Dawson-Clarke and all our Volunteer Hosts and Welcomers.

We look forward to developing and expanding the Green Homes Sheffield network.

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