

Demonstration, inspiration ... replication? Assessing the impact and limits of social learning from Eco-homes Open Days in the UK

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Ten 'Open Homes' events took place across the UK in 2007 and 2008, in Oxfordshire, Brighton, Norfolk, Stroud, Llanidloes (Wales), London and across the country. The number of homes totaled 120, which together attracted 26,600 visitors. This research analyses the social learning from events where we have data, and focuses on Oxfordshire.

What we did

- 👉 We ran 'Open house' events in homes with low-energy or eco-design features in 2007 - 2008
- 👉 Visitors heard the story of the building from the owner and / or project designer / builder
- 👉 Homes were selected on the basis of the householders' willingness to take part and an informal judgement by the project co-ordinators that the home was 'interesting enough'
- 👉 Most homes achieved at least 20% reduction in energy, with some as much as 80%
- 👉 Where possible, we marketed our events through established heritage / architecture activities (London Open House and Heritage Open Days)
- 👉 There was a series of presentations / talks by some of the 'eco-home' owners and a trade fair with 30 businesses taking part (eg solar installers, energy advisors)
- 👉 Householders' recommendations for installers, products and suppliers were compiled into a directory
- 👉 Visitors were asked for a small voluntary payment
- 👉 We celebrated afterwards and encouraged a sense of community among the group of property owners



What we didn't do

- 👉 We didn't select homes for energy performance (but this was published where known)
- 👉 There were no underlying technical criteria for participation
- 👉 We didn't select homeowners for their technical knowledge or communication skills

"It shows there are things which can be done even without money: using an emergency, perhaps, to make eco-improvements."

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DECEMBER

Yesterday was bright. Panels on my roof focused light captured heat. It waited insulated. Tonight a lovely soak hot and deep. Sunbathing.

Averil Stedeford
Eco-home owner



Feedback from Oxfordshire events

Figure 1. Responses to the question 'Did you learn anything new in the following areas?' (n = 431. 100% represents 100% of responses to the specific question, not the percentage of all respondents, or all visitors.)

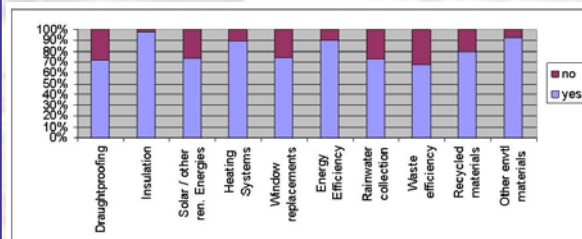
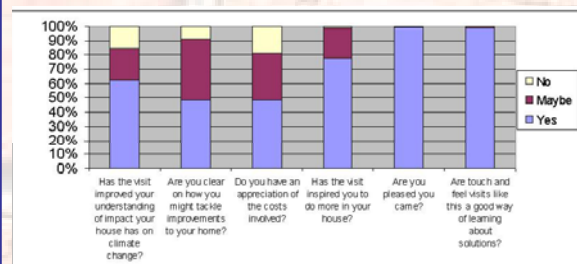


Figure 2. General feedback from the Oxfordshire Open Days in 2007 and 2008



Impacts & limits of social learning

- 👉 Visitors hear diverse and varied stories, which enriches learning
- 👉 Story-telling is a powerful mode of communication
- 👉 Peer-teaching is inspiring ('look what can be done by someone like me in a home like mine')
- 👉 It is very time- and labour-intensive, relying on lots of volunteers and goodwill
- 👉 Many property owners either didn't have complete information on costs or didn't want to share it
- 👉 Visitors wanted recommendations for trusted suppliers and installers but in many cases there were none worth recommending
- 👉 Social learning has the potential to accelerate replication, particularly among early adopters through making it visible and tangible
- 👉 Visitors (the public) can be trusted to draw their own conclusions
- 👉 Social learning should be seen as a complementary activity to other means of communication, not a replacement
- 👉 Improvements are planned for future events but the central idea of ordinary householders telling their story will be kept

"I'm delighted that people came and were interested in the houses. It was very productive, I was pleased to participate."

