



The Dorset Green Living Project

Final report

December 2020

Contents

1. Summary
2. Project aims
3. Covid-19 and The Dorset Green Living Project
4. Demographic
5. Groups
6. Evaluating the Data
7. Feedback
8. Observations and Recommendations

1. Summary

The Dorset Green Living Project (DGLP) ran from January to December 2020 with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund. Preparatory work began in September 2019, which included: presenting the project to groups, marketing on social media and updating and revising the guidebook. (The Transition Together guide first used in Totnes, Devon was our starting point). The project guidebook presents sound practical advice in one simple programme with a local focus. Fundamentally the project brings groups of people together, preferably from households within a community, to discuss and try out different ways of reducing their carbon footprint.

In March 2020, fifteen groups started the project and Sustainable Dorset (SD) attended their first meetings. Subsequently a further four groups commenced the project. Participants represented most geographical areas of the county.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 reached the UK in March and although SD continued to offer support and suggested Zoom meetings, nine groups out of nineteen didn't continue and subsequently disbanded.

SD has collated data provided by groups that completed the project and feedback from those that did not. The majority of participants were very positive about their experience and some have continued to be involved in other green initiatives in their communities. 151 people have joined the online platform of the project on SD's website.

2. Project aims

The project's aims were to: bring people together to discover practical and proven ways in which they could reduce their carbon footprint, save money and build stronger communities that would support one another. This would be achieved by: meeting regularly, discussing the chapters in the DGLP guide (which covers the effects of climate change both worldwide and locally, energy, food, water use, transport, waste and community building) and, where necessary and practical, making lifestyle changes. The project set out to recruit up to 20 groups of between 6-8 households.

3. Covid-19 and The Dorset Green Living Project

At the beginning of the pandemic it seemed as if communities were coming together, that people were taking stock of the Climate and Ecological Emergency, but as the year continued the positive aspects of a bad situation appear to have waned.

Despite maintaining contact with groups, some made the decision not to continue but several finished within the timeframe. Although groups could have continued on Zoom, many were unable to do so for one reason or another.

4. Demographic

The majority of participants were over 40 and of white British ethnicity, which mirrors the demographic of the county. (Less than 5% of Dorset residents are BAME and nearly 30% are over 65). Participants tended to be middle class and already had an interest in greener living. A number of groups belonged to the church and had strong community ties. One diversity community group

expressed an interest but in spite of SD meeting with them they did not proceed with the project. Going forward, it would be desirable to reach a more diverse demographic and also those who do not already have an interest in or knowledge of the green agenda.

5. Groups

Of the nineteen groups that participated, the majority were in towns along the coast, three were from rural areas in the north, one in Wimborne and one in Verwood. Interest had been expressed from individuals in Sherborne, Gillingham and Shaftesbury but didn't materialise into groups.

The Beaminster (Greener Ways) group came out top for; finishing the course, everyone returning completed forms and providing their carbon footprint calculations.

Of the ten groups that continued the project, three groups were yet to finish at the time of writing and four of the groups only returned one or two forms. Three groups started in Christchurch, which reduced to one group, 9 forms were returned. Two groups successfully completed the course by accessing the guidebook on the SD website.

Of the groups that were unable to complete the course, one was a group of mothers with young babies, so family commitments took over but they were all keen to make changes. Another group met a few times then continued informal meetings on Zoom. As a result one family installed solar panels and a wind turbine and are actively trying to develop small-scale renewable energy projects.

Poor broadband saw the demise of two rural groups, as they were unable to meet on Zoom. It was encouraging to see interest from Councillors with two groups of council workers starting the project who were keen to make greener choices.

Several groups who stopped meeting have indicated that they would be keen to restart the project once lockdown restrictions have been lifted.

6. Evaluating the data

Each member of the group was given an evaluation form to be completed at the start and end of the project. Unfortunately, a number of participants did not return a completed form and neither did they complete a carbon footprint calculation at the start and finish of the project. This could partly have been due to calculations not being accurate or being significantly different due to travel restrictions. That is not to say that the project hasn't inspired some participants to make significant changes including reducing car travel, flights and cruises but it would be more realistic for them to carry out another carbon footprint calculation when travel restrictions have been lifted.

A. Questions 1-6 gave an overview of the core principles of the project - climate change, reducing carbon emissions, cutting household costs and improving community relationships.

Overall there was an increase in knowledge about climate change and ways of cutting emissions. There was also a move towards tighter bonds within communities, some felt less isolated and groups who were already members of the local church had a strong sense of community.

B. Questions 7-13 Chapter 2 Spend Less Eat Better

Not a significant change in eating patterns as some groups were already growing their own, buying organic and seasonal fruit and vegetables and eating less meat but nevertheless some participants made a move towards following this regime and wasting less food.

C. Questions 14-20 Chapter 3 Spend Less on Energy

Most participants who were not already with renewable electricity companies switched provider. Renewable energy use increased and there were plans for further improvements including installing a Tesla battery. A thermal camera was purchased by one individual, to check for heat loss, which was then offered to others to use. Some pipes were insulated, reflective insulating sheets placed behind radiators, thermal blinds added to bedroom windows and lights changed to LEDs. Improved habits of switching off lights and devices was reported.

D. Questions 21-27 Chapter 4 Getting Around

A definite shift for one group member towards sustainable driving. Several groups tend not to use public transport, possibly due to the lack of a nearby service. An increase in cycling and walking and a reduction in car sharing, partially due to lockdown which has also caused a reduction in flights.

E. Questions 28-32 Chapter 5 Wasting Away

Some improvement in this section, most already thoroughly recycle but have difficulty in reducing single use plastics. Eco bricks are made, terracycling stored until collection points reopen. Refilling of washing up liquid/shampoo/etc, increase in buying second-hand and mending.

F. Questions 33-36 Chapter 6 Save on Water

Some definite improvements overall in water use, with everyone minimising flushing, leaks, showers and more using grey water.

G. Questions 37-40 Chapter 7 Community Building

Community events were affected by lockdown so difficult to assess changes. Community allotment set up and fruit trees planted. Increase use of local shops and deliveries including milk in glass bottles.

7. Feedback

Things that were liked

It involved me making many changes in my life that were initially hard but then became much easier and satisfying

Getting together with likeminded people who also want the best for future generations. It was empowering and shows us that we can all make a difference

Very interesting discussions, non confrontational approach by our leader

The course gave us new info and stimulated new thoughts

Trying out new ideas and reporting back to the group and also sharing these ideas with friends and family not in the group

Saving money

I liked being made to examine what I was doing as regards to green living, it gave me a few ideas

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| Wide ranging suggestions eg big changes - solar panels and small changes - making oat milk, worked very well for discussion groups |
| Handy resource to keep and refer back to |
| I found the study material very stimulating especially the related material and film clips, they made me look in depth at each section of the guide |
| It was good to share ideas with others and learn from their lifestyles, the group was very supportive and our Zoom sessions were fun and inspiring, these meetings provided the discipline to read and make notes for each session so I read more carefully than I would have on my own |
| Comprehensive and practical guide, with useful links to follow and this facilitated a productive online group study. Probably also helped by lockdown as most of us had more time for homework |
| We worked through the set chapter over the course of two weeks, then we met on Zoom for one hour to raise questions and discuss our action plans. After chairing the first few to get it started, I asked each person in the group to lead a session |
| I particularly appreciated doing this study with my husband as that meant we were both informed and keen to make changes to our household management |
| Most of all I liked the fact that this study enabled me to understand better the relative impact of my actions and how to make changes that would reduce my carbon footprint |
| It doesn't end there, it's an empowering tool to draw back on as needed, for that reason I'm glad that I have a paper copy as well as online. |
| It's helpful to learn from other people's experiences before making big changes. |
| Loved the links to 'Game Changers' and 'Economics of Happiness' |
| Great for exchanging ideas & learning about local eco shops, I feel I've gained a lot from meetings |
| I enjoyed meeting and talking, it was interesting to hear other people's opinions, I now think differently about many things I took for granted |
| Working as part of a group- the comradeship and sharing- relaxed atmosphere |
| The links and videos were very helpful and informative and certainly made me think about every aspect of consumerism |
| Things that were least liked |
| Some ideas admirable but unaffordable to average person - Heat pumps, solar panels, electric cars |
| A need to recognise that the major initiatives in tackling climate change must still come at national and international level |
| Nothing I didn't like, some of the book info didn't apply to our area |
| It was so frustrating during lockdown not being able to meet and start our community project but we improvised on zoom |
| The tool for calculating carbon footprint. The resurgence carbon calculator was tricky. It didn't save my entries (some were empty but had reverted to default answers) but it did save the summary at the end. Might there be an improved tool |
| Suggestions |
| Please carry on |
| Widen the groups to schools and colleges Expand and role out nationally |
| How about an online community for graduates of the course to share on-going progress/ideas please and for help regarding particular sustainability challenges |
| Condense the contents into a smaller easy to read booklet and send to town/village councils inviting their help to get the message out into communities |

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| Some of the questions (on the evaluation form) are ambiguously worded and the two 'Strongly Agree/Disagree' columns are superfluous |
| Target younger people if possible |
| Ensure groups have a dynamic leader who is not over bearing as the project is better when all feel able to fully participate, as our group has done with a great coordinator despite covid |
| Would like to roll it out to community and villages around |

Feedback from groups that didn't finish the project

A Overview

We calculated our footprint, and last time it was 8.3 tonnes, and this time it was 6.4 tonnes :)

Covid reduced my carbon footprint hugely, for example, our long-haul flights were cancelled.

13.9 tonnes 10.4 tonnes 8.8 tonnes

I thought the project was a brilliant idea and the pre-meetings at the beginning helped me to see other people cared about similar things.

B Food

We have engaged with a local farmer for dairy delivery and have bread delivered, I have restarted meat free cooking which had fallen by the wayside. We have an allotment.

We use a local farm dispenser for milk and milkshakes using reusable glass bottles.

We use a local farm veg box delivery to support the local farmers and reduce our food footprint. We buy our fish from a local fishmonger.

We do not eat meat.

Making bread is a good upper body workout.

I am trying to buy as much grown in the UK fruit and veg etc as is possible.

We are hoping to 'harvest' more veg from our garden this year.

We've been eating a 'flexitarian' diet for quite a long time, and are continuing doing so.

C Energy

Using solar chargers to charge portable electronics.

Everyone on the call was very receptive to new ideas and I think everyone has made tweaks in how much energy they use, more mindful of waste and water.

D Transport.

Driving less. Working from home 1 day per week (60 mile round trip) and shopping locally (walking distance) more of the time, more exercise starting and finishing at home.

We have not used a car since Christmas, we use our bike plus trailer for shopping and dog trips.

E Waste

We have reduced the amount of plastic waste we produce even more, by getting milk delivered, and actively buying products from local shops with less/no plastic. It's not always possible to be plastic free, but we do our best!

We purchase more from the local fair-trade shop, and need less new clothes,

We do our utmost to select products with no or minimal packaging.

I'm using the wax fabric not cling film nearly all the time now, even doing what Mum did and use a saucer or plate over dishes in the fridge, though we usually always cook just what we need to save waste. We compost all veg matter and always have done.

Husband likes to repair things.

We did not use any wrapping paper for Christmas preferring to use reusable cloth bags.

G Community

I failed miserably to get the group going after our first meeting in Mar'20 as some couldn't use Zoom for poor internet. Covid has changed attitudes sufficiently to get more interest in the importance of self-sufficiency both as a nation and individually. I appreciate the funded project has now ended but the material could be more important this year than before.

Seems like forever ago that we started the project. In some ways the world in which we have been living in has made it easier to make changes, some of which will certainly stay.

Time became busy doing 'survival' things such as shopping, schooling and keeping safe. I hope you are able to go for it again without the threat of a pandemic

All of our group members have young children and 3 have given birth in the last 10 months! We have continued to keep in touch via our WhatsApp group and often exchange gardening tips, home schooling inspiration and are currently trying to set up a buying group to reduce waste. We have also had a few meet ups with babies and toddlers and swapped veg and other produce. So, from a community point it has been a real positive.

8. Observations and recommendations

- I. In total, 151 people registered online, 84 joined a group and at least 49 completed the project. The majority did not send in a carbon footprint calculation but for those that did, there was a 57.05-tonne reduction in total. Obtaining an accurate footprint calculation would have been challenging due to the changes in daily living imposed by lockdowns. Although not everyone returned evaluation forms it didn't preclude them from learning from the project and making positive changes to their lives, as shown by the feedback.
- II. With communities at its' core the project suffered when physical meetings could no longer take place. The groups that continued tended to be well established groups of

friends/neighbours/parishioners. Several people were keen to take part but felt too shy to contact their neighbours. However, encouragingly, one of the most common things that people enjoyed was meeting others and doing the project together. In future, graduates of the project could be invited to recruit new participants.

- III. Initially the project was slow to get off the ground, possibly because the perception was that it had to be done with neighbours (who often don't know each other). If it was aimed at a variety of groups, people may feel more confident, i.e. with people they already know, which may then empower them to take those conversations into their communities.
- IV. The guidebook is long and quite 'clunky' was one description. A condensed online and hard copy version would make it more accessible to a wider range of people.
- V. An online community page was set up for the project on the SD website and although 151 people have joined it, it hasn't had much activity (the majority of participants being in the older age group, could be the reason). A vibrant online community might appeal to younger participants, or older participants could be encouraged to use the platform.
- VI. The Guidebook was praised for its content and wealth of accessible information. It is available online on the Sustainable Dorset website but could potentially be made more widely available for public reference, eg libraries.
- VII. Covid 19 and lockdowns have really affected this project. Zoom, as an alternative to meeting in person, has not been embraced by most of the groups and in some areas of the county it is not an option (due to poor broadband). Also, the virus has occupied people's minds and their ability to be involved in other things has changed.
- VIII. It has been suggested that this project could be useful in schools. Certainly children could be encouraged to talk to their parents regarding these issues but the guidebook really speaks to the slightly older participant who is already established in their home. Perhaps a young persons version, which covers the same/similar topics, could be produced.

“I think this project should be rolled out across Dorset as part of the Council's Climate Emergency.... It's practical, useful, easy to follow, and would (in usual times) bring communities together” Sarah