

How to guide: turn your idea into a reality!

Leah: Hello, my name is Leah Furniss, and I'm a development officer working within the community support team at community first Yorkshire. Increasingly a large part of my work involves supporting local groups and charities to think about the changes they can make in their local communities to raise awareness of climate change the impact we all have on the environment and how to reduce the amount of energy we use. Today, I am joined by Ray Newton, project manager from the Monk Fryston and Hillam Community Building Sustainability project near Selby, to find out about how as a community they are rising to the challenge of tackling climate change at a local level. Ray, Hello, and thank you for agreeing to talk to me today.

Ray: Yeah, good afternoon. Yeah. A pleasure.

Leah: Thanks, Ray. So I suppose the first question, what exactly is the project?

Ray: Well, the project is, effectively a partnership of all our community buildings, it's that includes our community centre, church, church hall, primary school, cricket and football clubs, with the aim of making those buildings carbon neutral. That's what the project is the primary aim, we have some secondary aims of trying to use these to influence our residents to adopt more environmentally friendly behaviours, and then share our learning with other communities and similar villages around the area.

Leah: That's great. And that's what we're doing today sharing the learning. It's fantastic. And what prompted you to action? Why did you start the project?

Ray: Well, the project's been in the making, I guess, for quite a number of years. The Community Association, which is leading the project started its journey towards carbon neutrality back in 2014, when we redeveloped the community centre, and as we were redeveloping it, we took decisions to make the insulation as good as we could, use LED lighting and prepare the underfloor by putting in underfloor heating for the future. We also wanted to cut out drafts behind radiators to make best use of the hall and things like that. So that's where we started.

The next stage was 2018, at one of our Beer Fest planning meetings, one of the young mums in the village who was on the team came along and said, look - can we make this as sustainable as possible this Beer Fest. Now, most of us our intention was to go there, have some fun drink beer and make money for the community and for the school a we shared the event. But everybody adopted unanimously, and these were people from the PTA, the Community Association and just members of the village who were interested in doing it. That was the next stage.

The stage after that 2019 The Community Association formally adopted a policy of all our future developments being sustainable, being as environmentally friendly as possible and sustainable. And the immediate trigger for the project was autumn 2019. Now, if you remember, in this country, it was very, very wet. Yeah. But around the world. It seemed the world was on fire, Australia was burning, Sydney

was threatened. California was threatened with wildfires across North America. At the same time, Greta Thunberg was speaking at the UN General Assembly, and to see to say, I think the best expression would be a lukewarm welcome by the world leaders who turned around and said, but you don't understand. Now at that point. It was like, come on, we've got to do something, we can't change the world. But we can do something to start. And that's where the start point was. I think we in private conversations with other community building leaders, we we'd sound each other out and talked about the environment and all of them that said, yeah, we'd like to do something but Ray, What we haven't got is the time. We haven't got the money. And we haven't got the expertise. So there we are. That was a start point, no money, no time, no expertise but a desire to do something.

Leah: I think nearly all the best projects out like that, because if you did have the time and the money quite often the problems not there and you don't feel like you're encouraged to action in the same way do you? In 2019 and all that that was happening then with everything you're saying there about the weather it's like this year. Summer 2021 some of the stuff we're seeing; the flooding in Europe, there's been terrible temperatures in Canada as well this summer. That's not going away and it is very scary. So what sort of specific things have you done since, in the last two year period? As, I know you're specifically working on some really targeted things?

Ray: Yeah, well, we have done some stuff, what we had to do was to first of all get some help, because we didn't know where we're going. Everyone hasn't got any money, so we had to find a way of finding money to do what we were wanting to do. And I suppose also, we have to share the project with the village, because we're talking about the village leaders who all want to do it, we have to share it and cascade it down. Because without the community support, then we wouldn't have got any money.

Leah: Ray, Out of curiosity, how big is your village? Do you know numbers?

Ray: Well it's two villages, it's Monk Fryston, and Hillam But to the outside, if you come into the into the area, it looks like one village because the co-joined. So share the same school etc, etc. It's about 3000 people.

Leah: Okay. In terms of things that you have done, is there anything particular big, something that's taken up quite a bit of time that you really want to go into bit more detail about? Or mention?

Ray: Yeah, well, the first thing was actually to bring the people together, that took quite a bit of time, whilst we knew each other, we drink lots of beer together, we've actually never worked together. And like lots of organisations, they are very secretive about the data. And we got a person called Kate Unwin, who's the also known as the Yorkshire energy doctor to join our steering group. And Kate was a catalyst in getting people to share information, share data. So actually getting started from 2019. Yes, this is what we want to do and agree on the terms and stuff. It was probably June, before late May, June, before we actually were working together as a group. What we big, big challenges in getting people to share data, it really was a question of I'll show you mine if you show me yours when it came to pricing. But Kate also coached us into doing energy surveys, which is the foundation of it, she was a catalyst in helping us find grants by the first big one. Which was for the feasibility study, which again satisfied all the needs, and we knew nothing. So Kate found us a grant from the Rural Communities Energy Fund opportunity to apply, where we were able to get professional advice and have a professional survey done. Which satisfied everybody's needs of not knowing what to do independently, an independent company of surveyors to come around our buildings, and do it. So that was one of the big things. And we managed to secure a grant of let me think, £32,000 pounds to do that. We applied in late July. And we finally got to know in mid-September. And that's kicked off October the first and finished at end of

June this year. So a long time. But the first bit stage of it, which was important stage was to tell us if we've got a basket case of an idea or a goer.

Leah: And I'm assuming you were told that Ray - It's definitely a goer?

Ray: Yeah well we are a goer, but we had a break in the grant of four weeks. And that was our first stage. And that was important to put in because it was at a point where the grantors Rural Communities Energy Fund knew that if we hadn't got a case, to go to a project, they didn't waste any more money on it. Yeah. So that was important, particularly from a grant application point of view. So that was one of the big things. And that gave us the format, the structure and all the information we required to press on.

Leah: Yeah, so that feasibility study has really kind of given you 'This is where you are now, this is where you should be going, and this is how to do it' really help you with that planning stage of things, which is great.

Ray: Absolutely. But we did we did a lot of it ourselves because all our projects been conducted in the pandemic. And as a group of partners because we formed a partnership subcommittee. We've never met, we've never met collectively, through the whole thing. We've been zooming away and emailing and chatting away individually or collectively. But we've formed a cohesive unit to go forward.

Leah: That's great. And you did mention Kate Unwin there, anybody whose listening and is particularly interested in this sort of area. Kate has a fantastic website, if you just Google Yorkshire Energy Doctor. There's lots and lots of information on there. Were there any other organisations or people that particularly helped you when you're putting this together?

Ray: A key one right at the outset was the Selby AVS a guy I had worked with there before the chief executive Chris Hailey-Norris. I approached him very early to say Chris, how do we how do we go about doing this? And Chris was ever so enthusiastic and said, right Ray this is what I advise you to do. What we do is get a steering committee together, which we did, which was formed by myself another person, Kate and Chris. And that was instrumental Selby AVS were fantastic. Later on, we had to find grants. And Chris was instrumental in pointing us in the right direction to conduct the Community Survey, all the technology behind it with Survey Monkey is etc, etc. And also, he was instrumental in just making the meetings cohesive, because he's cracking guy, and he was independent, and he was the one who could always in a difficult moment, find a line to get it to get to happen.

Leah: Yeah, know exactly what I mean, I've been in a couple of Chris's meetings. You do need someone in there like that to kind of keep on track. Definitely.

Ray: Very important. Another organisation that was important was Hillam parish council. Because when we started doing the community survey, we didn't have any funds, no money whatsoever. We went along to parish councils and say look, we need some money just to print off the community survey and do early communication. And they said, yeah, we believe we want you to do it, here's 100 quid, and that was more than enough to just get the show on the road.

Leah: So I'm just going to sum it up, because there's quite a few things we covered there. So there is Kate Unwin the Yorkshire Energy Doctor, there's your local association of voluntary services with Chris, who's been supporting you as well, your local parish council, you've also gone to, and they've been supportive as well. And then obviously, the big ones, the one that funded the Feasibility study, the Rural

Community Energy fund. And, I mean, you've touched on this a little bit in that a lot of this took place during the pandemic, and that also your brand new organisation, you have set that up, sort of alongside those, was there any really particular challenges in this sort of stage of the project?

Ray: Absolutely. Communications, not just amongst ourselves, but with, with the residents. We had a lot of a lot of people were shielding. You know, there's all if you remember, there was all the isolation, you can only go out and walk for an hour an hour a day, public buildings were closed. So we couldn't, we couldn't actually call a meeting of all interested parties, it all had to be done remotely. So that was difficult. And that what we what we learnt there was the best way of communicating was a cascade process, or use existing social media sites, right. So by cascading from the leaders of all the organisations, it went down through the management group, their governance group, and then down into their membership. So we had this pyramid in each of the five organisations to share the information which we were pushing out with those people direct, because those were the ones who, first of all would benefit from what we're doing. And then it would spread into the wider community where we didn't get to was the users of those buildings. So they're all community buildings. And there's many different people go to the user group sessions, for instance, preschool or Slimming World or yoga, whatever, you know, people come in from all over to use those buildings to do different things. And we couldn't get to those people. It was it was just impossible. So we had real difficulties in just communicating, real difficulties in getting into the wider audience. So yeah, challenge was talking to people.

Leah: I mean, some of that definitely will have been exacerbated by the pandemic. I know for a lot of community building, the yoga groups and things like that, that you mentioned, they just didn't meet for months and months on end. And obviously, everybody's focus was elsewhere as well at the moment and have seen the Monk Fryston and Hillam community association do have a website and on there, there is a link to the Rural Communities Energy Fund RCEF feasibility study. So if anybody's interested in having a look and seeing what one them looks you can visit the webpage and see that on there as well. And how did, I mean, that was the survey part at the beginning. But I also know you've been doing a bit of work with involved in the community about letting them know sort of what the results of this work have been so far, and what your next steps are, how have you how have you kept them involved in that part of the process?

Ray: Right. Okay. So we before we answer that question, I just say that Kate also pointed us to another grant opportunity, which was to apply for a thermal imaging camera through the postcode lottery. And this was this coincided with our application to the RCEF and Kates view was, Look thermal imaging camera be great to see where you're losing heat through the building where you're wasting money. So and it's also a great community engagement tool.

So we, we applied, but what I noticed was that the grant opportunity was for 20,000 pounds and thermal imaging cameras about two and a half. And it seems to me like a lot of work if we only went for two and a half. So we have actually applied for solar panels and a battery storage electric storage battery for the community centre. And lo and behold, we were successful. So we got a grant effectively for 19,200. To pay for those things, we did use a thermal imaging camera for the survey in our buildings and had some remarkable results. But also, the solar panels were installed in the early part of this year in March and the battery about May. And that's been terrific results, because we've actually been self-sufficient electricity through the months of May get it from May, June, July, and August. And we're just starting as the nights are changing to draw on the grid. So that's a brilliant, Thank you, Kate.

Leah: And I would imagine something like that thermal engine camera, did you use it with the school by any chance cause I could just imagine school kids loving that tool?

Ray: Absolutely. So concurrent with what we've been doing. The school has been going for, I think the Environmental Green flag Award, which is a think of national and international recognition. And Rick Waites, the head there was a real champion of this project, he took it on along with dealing with COVID. And his staff took it on to try and achieve that standard. And they've been terrific. They managed to get the bronze award by Christmas silver by Easter the gold award, I think was came through on the second day before the end of term, summer term. And fantastic.

One of the things that they were doing there is that they had a group I think they'll call the Eco warriors. And the Eco warriors got to I will say I was going to say use I think play with might be the best term to use the thermal imaging camera, where they were using it just to identify the different heats in there. And because it was a summertime, and all things like that, but this autumn, they're actually going to use it themselves to survey the school, the kids. Yeah. And it's a fantastic behavioural change programme. And what we see is a multi-faceted benefit because the kids are taking they're learning it back into their homes, which is where we want to be that also taken it with them on their lifetime, through the into the future to be to act as responsible environmental citizens. Yeah, it's just brilliant what they're doing.

Leah: Yeah, it really does sound like you're starting to take different elements of the community along with you. Yeah, it's amazing how quick it can snowball, isn't it?

Ray: So that's fantastic. And then and then roll down from there. We, one of the residents, works for a large internet engineering company WSP. He saw that they were offering a grant for community projects. And he said, how about us applying it was about two and a half thousand pounds. And so we did do that was in November last year. And we were notified for that we notified on the 23rd of December Christmas time Christmas present that we'd be successful. And we used that money to create what we call the WSP eco wall, Cool – Absolutely. Cool. How do you dream a name up like that? Well, first of all, you start with a bottle of red wine. But the purpose of the scheme was to reinsulate an external wall, which we knew had got poor insulation, and we use a thermal imaging camera to do before and after shots. And it's demonstrated its there so that's why we got to all those things are in our project booklets, which we issued in late June and captured all those things, which we delivered to every household and in between that time we've been doing project updates to people who are interested by email. I think we've issued about five or six so far, there's another one due just to keep people posted with what we're doing.

Leah: That's great. So you are keeping people up to date with the changes. I'm just loving how those different elements are coming together. Funders do really love to have something specific that they can kind of so many of them love that where they can really show 'we funded this' so they've got that wall installation. And when we talk to groups about applying for funding and evidencing the need and them being able to show the impact the differences made. You're definitely doing it with the camera in a slightly more unusual way than what we normally see with evidence. But you've got the image there of what this wall was doing before, we've used your funds and this what it's doing after - and that's the impact it's making. So that's great.

Ray: And what we want to do Leah, is actually offer that camera availability to residents to be able to do their own homes. Information is everything. And but yeah, the residents will then have to choose or could choose to either do something or nothing. The lovely story that that I have is one of the guys who's on the project team. He took the thermal imaging camera to, to survey one of the buildings, and

they took it home. And he took it into his back garden and survey the back of his house where there was an extension. And he said, Oh, Ray you could see the join in the extension from one side of one building to the other. Well, the extension was not as well insulated. He said I can even see the radiator inside the house now. Powerful stuff.

Leah: Yeah, yeah. I think sometimes you perhaps know that you have to be more efficient, but really seeing it like that. It's very powerful for people. It's great that the residents are taking it into their home, shows you you're really getting people on board. So obviously you've done this feasibility study, and you've got some bits and pieces done, you've got some best pieces of funding on what is it you're kind of working towards at the moment, then what's the next steps for the project?

Ray: Okay, so this is this is the big bit this is actually doing stuff, not just talking about doing stuff. And what we've what we're actually doing now is we broken the project overall back down into the different community buildings, and each of the owners of the buildings operators of the buildings are looking to implement the feasibility study. So for instance, the Cricket Club, which supplies all the utilities into the Football Club, which is independent next door, they desperately need to replace their existing cesspit, this is where it gets sexy, get rid of and change the cesspit as they need more capacity, because it's been growing. That's on the list, then they want to do solar panels with a battery to make themselves sustainable. And then the next one would have to that would be the heat stuff, you know, putting in an air source heat pump. So with a little bit of energy efficiency, so we're putting projects together to do that. The and incidentally, the cesspit doesn't sound very sustainable, but it's costing them for I think 4000 pounds a year to cart their wastewater away. Whereas if they could either have a bio digester are linked to their drains, which are a long, long way away, it will be a fraction of that and it will, it will be less, it'd be much more energy efficient, it will we will generate much, much less carbon. So that's the cricket club.

The community centre which is well advanced, we just need an air source heat pump there and a bit more energy to-do work. And then the church has actually exploded into much bigger project, so we've actually parked the church for the moment. But we're working on the church hall, which is truly like any other village hall it's used from eight o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night on community activities that needs a refurbishment programme that's been driven by the surveys that we've done on the sustainability project. So it needs complete insulation, the roof needs sorting out the lighting needs sorting out the floor needs sorting out, they need a new air source heat pump, the new and neither new wet heating system, we're probably looking at like 50 or 60 thousand pounds their but, it will be a fantastic example of taking a 1970s building and bringing it up to date and what's required to do it.

Leah: and to do it in as environmentally friendly and sustainable a way as possible and with that being your driver, I think it's the way we have to go more and more with retrofits and things like that.

Ray: Yeah. And when I've talked to the funder, because we have we've been working on strategy to put funders to support each of those things. Yeah. When I talk to the funder, the lady was said, and I explained that we wanted to influence people wanted to share this information, which is a big father says listen to why I'm interested is that is the heart of what you're going to do with the money what we're going to help you do. The actual other stuff, the community environmental stuff and the engagement stuff. That's the fluffy stuff, but we love it. Because that's the added bonus the icing on the cake for you to get the grant to do it. Yes, you're going to do the community, your carbon neutrality stuff, but you're going to try and influence other people and share your learning.

And then find that the school well, that's a standalone thing because there's a government building, which we all pay for through our taxes, they're looking to get gain finance to do their work, through Salix, which is a government loan scheme, been going for years. And, you know, that's, that's where they're going for it and they're bidding for money now, but it's a very, very competitive market. You think of all the government buildings - schools in the country, libraries, etc, etc, hospitals that need to be brought up to date. So that's the, that's what we're doing. And we hope to be bidding this autumn to applying for grants, sorry not bidding, applying for grants to win funds to do it.

Leah: It sounds when you when you break it down, like I know from talking to you, in the past Ray, that this this is in many ways a really, really, really huge, huge project. But you have broken it down into very, I'm going to say manageable, but you know exactly what you need to do for each building. Yeah. And, and I'm sure there'll be some economies of scale there, you know, you talked about ground source heat pumps for more than one building, they're going those into two at the same time, and really working together collaboratively on that will definitely help with that.

I think, one sort of last thing that wanted to pick up on this with you, I think the idea of what can we do to tackle climate change? How can we become carbon neutral, it's really hard. I think, for some people to get the head round, it's almost so big, it's quite difficult even to think about. And sometimes perhaps we get a little distracted some of the smaller things that we can do at an individual level, which do make a difference. But I think there's so much value in communities coming together and approaching it in this way. And then tackling those slightly meatier projects that do really, really need to be done. What would you say to anyone who's in a similar position to yourself in their communities? Who's perhaps listening along to this and thinking, I'd love to do that here. But

Ray: yeah, but, but, but? Okay. The first thing is that it wasn't a fluke that we were able to start the project, we'd been talking to each other about what we wanted, and there was a good omens in the community. So to get going, so talk, talk to your colleagues you're on a Village Hall committee, talk to your colleagues find out what their appetite for it is, is it something you need, because lots of the organizations have got their own problems in funding are something else I more but you've got to have somebody who's willing to have enough time to do it, but talk to them.

And remember that you're not on your own? You know, we found Kate Unwin from nowhere. And we'd never heard of Kate, I knew Chris, I knew he was a star, but he's still a great help. But at the end of the day, it's the people in the different organisations that have done it. So you talk to your colleagues in the pre project stage, find out if they're interested, find out if they've got the appetite, there will be other people in your community who want it. We were surprised when we did our community survey. We had a 96% acceptance of the proposition to make our Yeah, 96%. And we had over 100 offers of help, please, great. Yeah, yeah. And we, this is a pandemic, we didn't, we couldn't go out and talk to people. But that's what came back. So you're not on your own. Find, you know, get help get the first seeds of it. Don't panic about it, as you said earlier Leah, you know, if you've got a Village Hall you got to heat it, you are going to sort heating out in bite sized pieces. And if you think about funding cause, nobody's got any money, there's an Awards for All offer up to 10,000 pounds that you can apply once a year, so long as you've got the right sort of community support behind it. So a justifiable project. So you can actually phase it out, you can do it over four or five years. Just pick the things which are important.

And I would say I will have a look at the energy hierarchy now that's the first technical term I've used today. And it I've never heard of it when I started. But if you if you want to look at it, look at it and see what it is. It's on our booklet, which I think is going to be on our website. And it basically says start at the top and the top bit is energy efficiency. Yeah. Make sure you turn the lights off. Make sure you've got

the heat on the right setting, etc. Energy efficiency, do that and work your way through it until you get to renewable energy, which is right down the bottom.

Don't panic about it, you know, you the government's going to give us out through COP. We don't know what it is, they've been dithering but understandably so because they don't know what the right solution is. But help will come. And I know that for heating, because I found that there was a real discrepancy. Community buildings which are often run by charities don't get funding, don't get help like the public sector or the domestic sector. We could get some help on the RHI, but it was long winded it was 20 years payback. Now, I've got it on good authority, because I actually lobbied our MP. And going back from the Department of Business, that community buildings around our size, about 2000 square feet. Maybe a bit more than that, I think. Yeah. So normal community buildings, Village hall sizes. They will qualify for grants when it's announced. They will. Yeah, so you know, that's going to help. So don't panic. You know,

Leah: talk to people, get your community involved

Ray: find the expert, find the people in your community who can help or want to help out because they do want to help, you know, like we want to do we all wanted to do something, but you need to just get that catalyst to get it going.

Leah: Ray Thank you so much. I think there was so much useful information there. And I think it will really inspires others to take action. And there is a lot of information including those feasibility studies on the Monk Fryston and Hillam website. Its mfhcc.com if you if you Google it. And if you would like to find out more about how you as a community can do more to tackle climate change, please do visit our website as well. www.communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk

Thank you Ray so much for joining today. It's been really interesting chatting to you and hearing more about the project.

Ray: If anybody wants to contact me, you can find me on the website.

Leah: Thank you Ray That's been lovely. Take care. Bye.