

Letchworth Retrofit Reimagined: insights to inform business planning

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About the author

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Executive summary

This report assesses the potential for Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to engage in a variety of activities to support energy efficiency and retrofit activity in the town. It highlights the foundations strengths and weaknesses and then examines a range of retrofit delivery models and their appropriateness for the foundation.

1. Brief

The scope for this report was set by Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation as part of the Community Energy Fund project.

The key questions to be addressed are:

- What organisationally could Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation do as a Community Benefit Society, learning from others that would **support wider up-take of energy efficiency improvements** in Letchworth?
- Which **business models** would work best to support energy efficiency improvements and if there is an innovation potential which can be developed?
- How can Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation **feedback to government and other local authority stakeholders** to improve the policy landscape for energy efficiency improvements?

Supporting LGCHF's charitable objects

A key requirement for this report was for the content to harmonise with LGCHF's charitable objects:

- Promoting the preservation of buildings and other environmental features of beauty or historic interest within Letchworth Garden City.
- Promoting the advancement of education and learning within Letchworth Garden City.
- Promoting the relief of poverty and sickness within Letchworth Garden City.

2. Summary of work to date

As part of Letchworth Retrofit Reimagined, People Powered Retrofit and the ASBP have supported Letchworth Heritage Foundation in exploring the potential for retrofit support in the local area via a series of events and activities.

Engagement

The events and the Home Energy Party day demonstrated an interest in retrofit locally and highlighted areas of debate and discussion.

This offers a base that can be built around and extended to reach other elements of the local community such as schools, business and the wider public who have a stake in the local built environment.

Technical assessments

The home assessment work using People Powered Retrofit's Home Retrofit Planner methodology demonstrated a variety of options for retrofit that could be scaled up or down depending on the property and the priorities of the owner or landlord of the home.

The assessment demonstrated the effectiveness of technical survey information at supporting decision making and options analysis that is foundational to the creation of a property specific Retrofit Plan.

Policy engagement

A People Powered Retrofit briefing note reviewed the Design Principles and associated guidance that Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation use in assessing proposed alterations and upgrades for existing homes and offered a commentary on these.

As well as running activities in Letchworth, the project has also connected with policy developments, via engagement with local authority and national government policy makers and via the MCS Foundation-supported [Local Area Retrofit Accelerator](#) (LARA) Hertsfordshire project.

3. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

We have made an assessment of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation's strategic and operational 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats' based on project activity and research.

Strengths

- Access to good quality information about the town and the built environment
- A staffed organisation with resources and track record
- A high profile and high recognition locally.
- A statutory role in buildings
- Own building stock in the town
- Excellent networks and partnerships with a variety of local institutions
- A trusted organisation.

Weaknesses

- Limits to the strategic and statutory role
- Part of a complex landscape with national and local government changes.
- Subject to complex rules and regulations
- Householders have a generally poor understanding of built environment rules and how they relate to energy efficiency improvements specifically.
- There is a drive to disinvest in poor performing properties
- Locally there is a lack of appropriate contractors
- There is a lack of trust and/or understanding from some about the role of the heritage foundation.

Opportunities

- Ability to raise awareness and knowledge of retrofit locally to help communicate the benefits
- Ability to centralise technical best practice and knowledge
- Ability to act as a local pilot for Hertfordshire Retrofit Strategy
- Ability to convene local partners in a coherent and unified manner.
- Ability to use capacity and financial resources to influence delivery of retrofit
- Ability to engage and develop the local supply chain.

Threats

- Getting things wrong damages trust.
- Lack of supply chain engagement and existing relationships.
- Limited capacity and resources needs to be spent on other priorities
- Elements of the Hertfordshire Retrofit Strategy contradicts or duplicates local activity
- Misinformation can contradict Heritage Foundation communications.
- Local institutions contradict each other or lack a coherent, unified message

4. Problem/interventions

Based on the SWOT analysis and project research, there are a number of possible interventions that could be enacted by the Foundation.

Problem	Intervention
Householders struggle to access appropriate information and understand the benefits of retrofit.	The Heritage Foundation could act as a filter, acting as a source of trusted information; acting as a bridge between national and local authority initiative and local people, translating opportunities and assessing local heritage implications.
Retrofit requires a number of organisations and agencies to interact and coordinate; the disparate nature of these interactions could slow the process and frustrate householders	The Heritage Foundation could act as a convener, bringing together the agencies and organisations necessary to deliver retrofit, ensuring alignment, identifying and filling gaps in policies and procedures etc.
Householders struggle to access appropriate funding - the the Heritage Foundation could act as a potential funder of works, lending money or issuing small grants	The quality and suitability of retrofit works is a concern for householders - the Heritage Foundation could act to set and enforce appropriate quality and design standards
There isn't the supply chain to carry out the works.	Coordinating training, business support and encouraging DIY approaches and skillshare where appropriate.
Contractors aren't clear on requirements for retrofit works, the skills and competencies required, the quality and heritage standards required; the size of the potential market; or where to access appropriate supplies and materials.	Heritage Foundation has a role in engaging contractors, ensuring they have access to the right information on retrofit, coordinating training.

5. Herts Local Retrofit Strategy project

Summary of Herts Local Retrofit Strategy and relevance of specific goals and actions to Letchworth context.

- **Action 1.1 A:** Launch general support service providing advice and signposting via web, phone and email
- **Action 2.3 B:** Promote use of low carbon, sustainable materials via support services and building control
- **Action 2.2 D:** Promote ventilation/moisture strategies through support services and grant schemes
- **Action 2.1 A:** Develop and deliver Hertfordshire procurement strategy which utilises local supply chain, particularly SMEs
- **Action 3.1 A:** Develop and manage lists of good and trusted suppliers
- **Action 3.1 B:** Develop and deliver support network for local installers with training including CPD sessions

6. Models

Here we set out a range of possible roles/models for Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to play with illustrative case studies for each.

These are:

- One Stop Shop services
- Supply chain engagement and training
- Householders DIY training
- Area based approach
- Bulk-purchasing scheme

One Stop Shop services

There is no single, agreed definition of a Renovation One Stop Shop. However, a number of projects and organisations have proposed loose definitions.

The ‘Innovate’ EU Horizon 2020-funded project¹ defined it as a virtual and/or physical place where homeowners can find all information and services they need to implement an ambitious deep renovation project. Including:

- Proactive engagement of homeowners.
- Energy renovation and financial planning.
- Coordination of the renovation process on behalf of homeowners.
- Long-term and affordable financing.
- Guaranteed results and post-work monitoring.

¹ <https://energy-cities.eu/project/innovate-2/>

One Stop Shops usually serve a distinct and defined geographical location which might be a town, suburb, city etc. In this case Letchworth could be the geographic location for the one stop shop - which is appropriate given its unique built environment and history.

Innovate typified renovation One Stop Shops into three categories: facilitation, coordination and all inclusive. These categories relate to the extent to which the One Stop Shop intermediary organisation takes a client through the customer journey. Facilitation generally just consists of advice and awareness raising, coordination involves advice and coordination of other services (perhaps including delivery of energy audits or assessments) and All Inclusive sees the One Stop Shop delivering all aspects of a renovation project.

Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation could therefore operate as a retrofit One Stop Shop, offering one of the functions set out below.

- Facilitation
- Coordination
- Full service

See appendix for diagrammatic representations of these models.

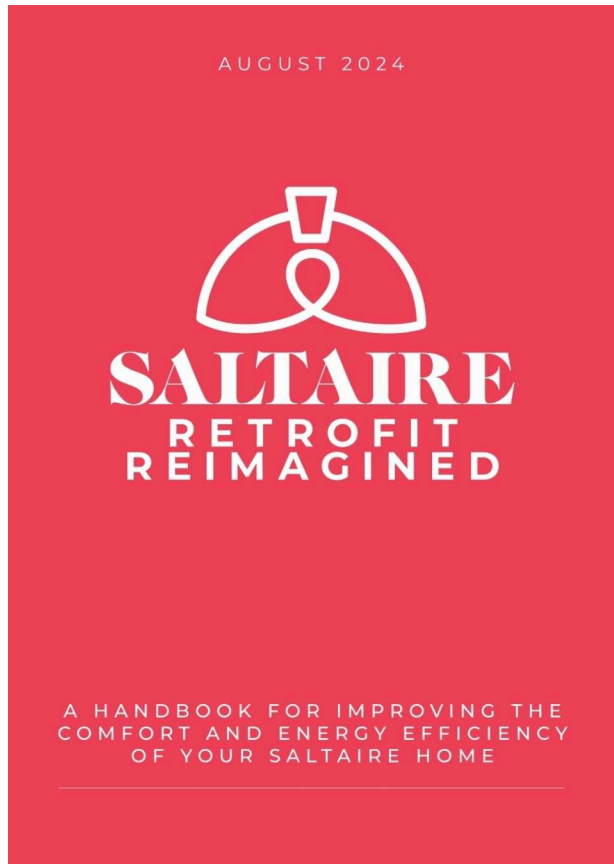
One Stop Shop Case studies

Facilitation: Saltaire Retrofit Re-imagined

Saltaire Retrofit Re-imagined is a small social enterprise initiative that aims to empower residents with the knowledge, advice and skills to improve the energy efficiency and comfort of their listed homes within the Saltaire World Heritage Site in Bradford, West Yorkshire.

Following initial engagement pop-ups listening to the issues residents experience when trying to heat their homes in Winter 2023, Saltaire Retrofit Re-imagined curated a 'home energy house party' offering residents the opportunity to explore how heat is lost from their homes and contributed to a context specific A 'Retrofit Handbook' linked engagement insights to technical retrofit advice from People Powered Retrofit specific to the properties and the unique heritage and planning context. The handbook, technical advice and additional documentation about Saltaire Retrofit Re-imagined can be found here:

<https://www.above-ground.co.uk/saltaire-retrofit-reimagined>





Coordination: York Community Energy

York Community Energy (YCE) is a small Community Energy organisation based in North Yorkshire. Whilst traditionally focussing on solar PV and small scale renewables the organisation shifted towards energy efficiency and advice in 2022 leading to the recruitment of new staff and expansion. YCE established the York Energy Advice service, providing invaluable support to vulnerable households struggling with energy bills. With funding from various sources, YCE reached over 850 households, offering advice, support and energy-saving technologies. Building on this YCE now offer a range of home assessment and retrofit plan services as well as acting as one part of YorEnergy, a larger one stop shop collaboration with their local authority.



Full service: People Powered Retrofit

People Powered Retrofit is an 'end to end' retrofit service for householders and is based in Greater Manchester and was established out of a collaboration between community energy organisation Carbon Co-op and urban design practice URBED. Employing Retrofit Advisors, Assessors and Designers, clients progress through successive stages of the retrofit client journey, securing a Retrofit Plan, design services and assistance with procurement of appropriate contractors for their project. The service has a number of distinct routes for householders to take - whether through the provision of standardised specifications or collaborations with local architects on 'full service' projects.



Supply chain engagement and training

With supply chain a limiting factor for the growth of retrofit activity, an increasing area of focus for local authorities and other retrofit intermediaries is around supply chain engagement and training. As well as meeting the demand for retrofit services additional benefits around local economic development, skills and training can be achieved through this approach.

Supply chain engagement can involve any of the following activities:

- Surveys and research with the local supply chain
- Business networking and referral activity
- Creation of a website or directory for local supply chain
- Collective or shared marketing activity to boost local profile
- 'Meet the buyer' events to link clients and supply chain

Provision of retrofit training can be formal (accredited or non-accredited) or informal such as toolbox talks delivered on site and in the course of works delivery.



A People Powered Retrofit Retrofit Matchmaking event

Householders DIY training

The Home Energy Party and associated technical assessment flagged that significant improvements can be made to the energy efficiency of homes using a low cost DIY approach.

People Powered Retrofit partner Carbon Co-op has a track record of running DIY retrofit training sessions for householders ranging from basic air tightness and draught proofing skills to more involved weekend courses on retrofit skills.

ENERGISE

Do It Yourself
Draught Proofing




 13:00 - 15:00
 Northmoor Centre, Longsight
 8th February 2025

An advert for a Draught Proofing skills session run by Carbon Co-op



A DIY Retrofit Skills course for householders run by Carbon Co-op

Bulk-purchasing scheme

Bulk-purchasing schemes are generally aimed at householders rather than supply chain and contractors (as they are able to access discounts via other means).

Bulk-purchasing schemes for retrofit measures can raise awareness and act as an incentive to trigger purchasing decisions but also generate cost savings and higher quality installations.

Testing the appetite and piloting a bulk purchasing approach would also help achieve a commitment made within the Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy.

Possible bulk purchases:

- Assessments and Retrofit Plans - carrying out multiple assessments in similar housing types can generate cost reductions (though we'd recommend full assessments in each home rather than making assumptions)
- Air pressure tests and other investigatory tests
- Airtightness works: handyperson service (in house or approved); materials purchasing
- Windows and doors - many window manufacturers offer savings on bulk orders.



A Carbon Co-op member discount on Ecological Building Systems materials

Area based approach

A more ambitious approach to the local coordination of retrofit services is to act as a community intermediary for an area based scheme - also known as 'street-by-street' retrofit. This approach is being promoted by organisations such as [Living Places](#).

Carbon Co-op is one of the few organisations delivering such an approach in a 5 property scheme in South Manchester. Carbon Co-op is contractually involved as an intermediary, contracting with the five householders, aggregating finance (loan and grant), procuring a local social enterprise contractor and partnering with the local authority.

Such a scheme is an effective approach though complex to establish and involves contracting risk for the intermediary.





Grants or loan provider



Some local organisations are able to provide small grants or loans to local householders to help cover the costs of basic energy efficiency improvements or assessments.

Community Energy organisation 'Hook Norton Low Carbon' provides zero percent interest loans, in part resourced from their renewable energy business.

Options Assessment

On the basis of the SWAT analysis the following options analysis has been carried out.

	Strategic Fit	Meets Identified Need	Resource required	Skills/ capacity required	Overall rating
One Stop Shop Facilitation					👍
One Stop Shop Coordination					
One Stop Shop full service					
Supply chain engagement and training					
Householders DIY training					
Area based approach					
Bulk-purchasing scheme					👍
Grants or loan provider					

On this basis One Stop Shop Facilitation, Supply chain engagement and training or Bulk-purchasing schemes all have potential to be piloted in Letchworth. We would also recommend an assessment of DIY training as the technical assessment suggests basic, low intervention energy efficiency improvements can be made via this route.

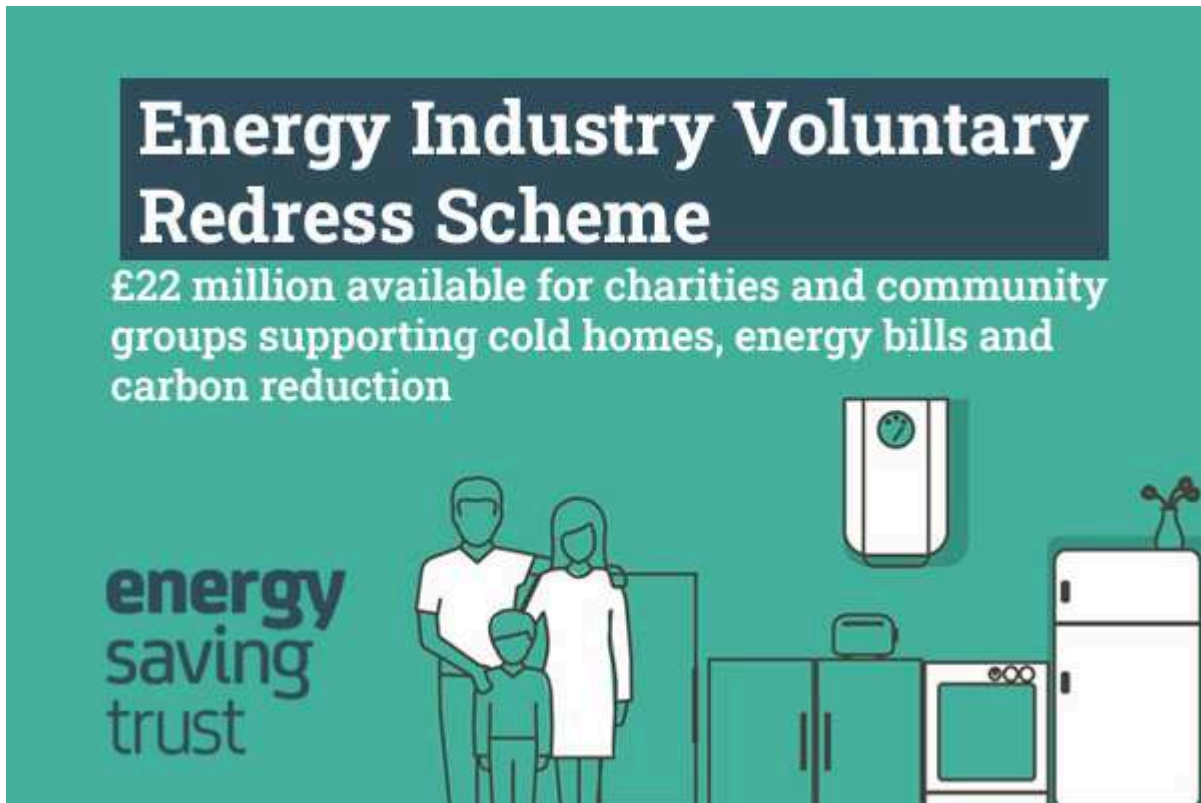
7. Governance or delivery options

A range of options exist for delivering or coordinating more retrofit activity in the area.

	Pros	Cons	Considerations
LGCHF directly	Greater degree of control	Requires foundation to invest capacity and resources; risk all borne by the foundation	Strategic decision on whether this is an area of focus for foundation / risk appetite
Joint Venture / Partnership	Benefit from skills and capacity of an existing partner, shared risk	Reduction in degree of control, complexity of forming a partnership etc. Careful consideration required on who to partner with given reputational risks.	Could be an effective way to use the resources and capacity of the foundation to achieve more through partnership.
As part of LARA Herts project	Benefits from existing policy work, officer time and harmonises with a strategy already in place.	Letchworth context is unique, uncertainty around resource available.	If resources are available Letchworth could be a testbed for a wider Herts approach.
Licensed via a partner e.g. Green Heat Co-op etc.	A co-op with an existing profile and track record.	As per above, reduction in degree of control, complexity of forming a partnership etc.	Worth exploring if a partnership approach is favoured.

8. Options for resourcing

Energy Redress



The Energy Redress Scheme is a fund operated by Ofgem and managed by Energy Savings Trust. It redistributes energy supply company fines to charitable organisations to operate advice and information programmes.

Considerations:

- Project based funding - projects last 2 years
- Open to 'charitable organisations' only - not just registered charities though.
- Resourcing for:
 - Advice and information services (highly competitive)
 - Innovation projects (resourcing for an intervention to make a long term impact in access to energy services)

Energy Redress may be an attractive option for LGCHF in seeking funds to establish a new service under the innovation fund as success rates tend to be quite high.

Community Shares



‘Community Shares’ are a form of raising funds via equity investment in community organisations, most commonly in Community Benefit Societies. The approach is codified in the Community Shares Handbook: <https://www.uk.coop/resources/community-shares-handbook-cs>

Community Shares is a good option for capitalising a social enterprise that will generate income as the shares attract interest and are withdrawable. It requires good evidence of income generating demand for services so may not be an option for LGCHF at this point, but may be in the future.

Appendix

One Stop Shop models

