



# COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

**Advice and Guidance to Setting up your own Group**

FEBRUARY 2021



# Introduction

## Background

The Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP) consists of Suffolk's Local Authorities and the Environment Agency, working with other organisations locally including Groundwork East and the University of Suffolk.

SCCP has a shared interest in supporting Suffolk's communities, businesses and residents to reduce carbon emissions, realise the economic benefits of reducing energy consumption and adapt to the future impacts of climate change.

The Partnership's vision is that "Suffolk wants to be an exemplar in tackling climate change, and protecting and enhancing its natural environment, to be the county with the greatest reduction in carbon emissions".

In 2019, SCCP's Local Authority members all declared a 'climate emergency'. As part of this, they will work together with partners across the county and region towards the aspiration of making the county of Suffolk carbon neutral by 2030.

## Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan

To strengthen Suffolk's climate action agenda and to engage, educate and empower individuals and organisations to act. Suffolk County Council is working with Ricardo Energy and Environment, and stakeholders from across the county to create a Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, due to be published later in 2021.

The [Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, Technical Report](#) notes that achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 will require significant action across a range of stakeholders in Suffolk, and this includes communities. In particular, the report notes the importance of community action to deliver local energy projects, for which communities are well placed to deliver.

## Who is this guide for?

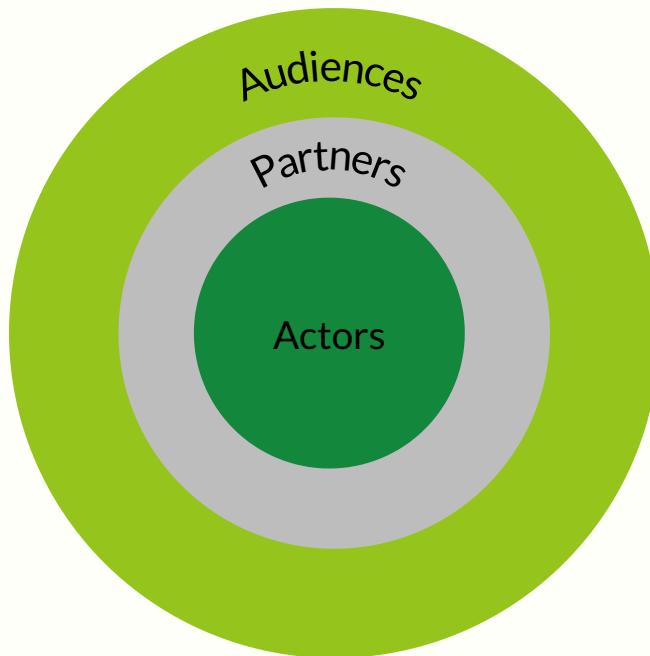
This guide has been produced to help local communities respond to climate change in Suffolk. Whether you have a formal group already and are looking to grow, or are a few like-minded individuals wanting to do more within your community, there is support available.

# Getting Started

Some groups start with just one individual who advertises their ambition within the local community, others by bringing a few friends together to think about how they can take action locally. From this some groups have an open event, such as a talk or a film, and ask people to come along to a follow up meeting.

You may also find it useful to undertake a mapping exercise of your community as it will determine who you need to engage with and also ensure you are not duplicating similar work that others may be already doing, or planning on doing. To map your community think about:

- Actors - those who will directly participate in your group activities to achieve your vision.
- Partners - those who you might collaborate with to achieve your vision or who have decision-making power and influence.
- Audiences - those who might be “interested” or “concerned” perhaps on the peripheries of your group or part of the wider community you want to engage with.



Consider groupings of people e.g. families, retired people; other organisations, community groups; cultural or religious organisations/groups; local authorities and services; individuals who are key nodes/figures in community.

Mapping your community will also help you determine the best, or most appropriate, method of engagement for each group of people identified.

# Getting Started

## Responsibilities

Once you have identified engaged people to become involved, it's important to think about how you will work together. Conflicts can arise if it's not clear how decisions will be made, or who has what responsibilities.

As a group, think about key tasks and responsibilities such as social media, checking emails, health and safety, and facilitating meetings, and decide who will be responsible for each task. Think about the strengths of each group member and assign responsibility accordingly. If you have a skills gap, consider what training might be needed.

It's then a good idea to formalise how you work together. Make a group agreement on how decisions will be made and group members' conduct e.g. 'decisions will be made by a consensus process' or 'we agree not to talk over each other in meetings'.

Also, plan how you will make meetings engaging. Ask yourselves:

- *How the meetings are facilitated?*
- *Are people given opportunities to contribute?*
- *How often will they be held?*
- *Where they are held?*
- *Are they accessible and inviting?*

## What do you want to achieve?

Once you have identified engaged people to become involved, you need to think about what it is you actually want to achieve and what your vision is.

A clearly defined vision will give you a framework to check progress against and talk about your project to supporters. As your group's ambition grows, having a clear vision will form an important part of your constitution or strategy documents, and will help with funding applications.

To define your vision, ask the following questions:

- *What are the needs / issues in your community or the local environment?*
- *What currently in your community or local environment needs to change?*
- *How could you see these challenges/needs addressed in a positive and sustainable way?*
- *What would improvement or transformation look like?*
- *What is the end goal / ideal result of your activity?*

# Organisational Structures

Once you've considered these questions, try to synthesise your responses and ideas into a mission statement, or a set of aims. Where possible, you should also make these aims SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound).

At this stage, you may also find it useful to develop an action plan by working backwards from your vision to create a timeline. The following table may help you with this:

Start date	Deadline	Aim	Action/Activity	Who is responsible?	Resources needed

## Organisational Structures

At this stage, you may wish to consider an organisational structure for your group. When deciding on a structure, you will need to consider what sort of activities you want to carry out in order to achieve your vision.

### Unincorporated Association

This structure is ideal for small groups with a membership, short term goals, low incomes, and which do not intend to employ staff or acquire property. Unincorporated Associations are quick and cheap to set up. Although, if your group has charitable aims and an annual income above £5,000 you are required to register with the Charity Commission.

You are free to draw up your own democratic constitution setting out the rules under which your group will be run. If your group plans to register as a charity, it may be best to adopt the Charity Commission's own model constitution for a charitable unincorporated association. If you seek legal advice on drawing up a constitution, you will be required to pay for this service.

As an unincorporated institution, you are able to apply for funding, set up a bank account, buy insurance, rent property, and own equipment.

However, an unincorporated association has no separate legal existence and remains for most purposes a collection of individuals. Any property or contracts would have to be held by individuals on behalf of the group, or any legal proceedings taken against the group would, in reality be against the individuals themselves, making them personally liable.

The issues surrounding liability can be quite complex and are beyond the scope of this guide. Further information is listed in the 'more information' section of the guide.

# Organisational Structures

If your group wants to do more than small scale community events, for example, if your group wants to become involved in generating renewable energy then an incorporated structure will be more suitable. An overview of the most popular structures for community organisations are given below.

## Company Limited by Guarantee

A company limited by guarantee is an increasingly popular choice for voluntary organisations. It is often appropriate if a group is going to be managing staff, land, contracts and/or large amounts of funding. There are two types of limited company; company limited by shares, and company limited by guarantee. A company limited by shares is generally not appropriate for community groups so is not covered in this guide.

A company limited by guarantee is a type of company which does not distribute income to shareholders. This means it can be not-for-profit, if all surplus income is reinvested back into the organisation. The company is incorporated, and has voting members. It is controlled by a group of directors, who can be paid or unpaid. This also means that it has a separate legal identity that is distinct from that of its individual committee members.

Companies are registered with and regulated by Companies House. To establish a company, you must adopt a governing document called a Memorandum and Articles of Association, and submit it to Companies House. It is a legal document, so it is sensible to get it checked by a solicitor.

## Charitable Company

A company can be a charity if it meets the legal requirements required by charity law. This must be clear from the governing document, so if you wish to set up a charitable company you should use the model Memorandum and Articles of Association approved by the Charity Commission.

In order to be considered charitable, the directors of a company are usually unpaid. Charities may pay their directors in exceptional circumstances, but organisations wishing to pay their directors as a matter of course are likely to find a Community Interest Company, Community Benefit Society or Cooperative Society structure more suitable.

Establishing a charitable company involves registering with the Charity Commission as well as Companies House, and then submitting your annual report and accounts to both organisations annually. If you are setting up a new organisation, it is worth considering whether a Charitable Incorporated Organisation would suit your needs instead as they do not need to report to Companies House, so they are simpler and cheaper to run than Charitable Companies.

# Organisational Structures

## Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

A CIO is a type of charity which is incorporated. It is quite a new legal structure – it was introduced in 2013. There are two types of CIO: Association Model and Foundation Model.

Association Model CIOs are membership organisations and hold elections, whereas Foundation Model CIOs are run by a small group of appointed trustees. CIOs must be registered with and report to the Charity Commission, regardless of their income.

Unlike charitable companies, however, they do not need to register with Companies House. This means the reporting requirements are simpler for CIOs than for charitable companies.

## Community Interest Company (CIC)

A non-charitable company can still be a not-for-profit organisation: many social enterprises are non-charitable companies. If your organisation is not charitable, you can guarantee your not-for-profit status by becoming a CIC. CICs commit their assets and profits permanently to the community by means of an “asset lock”, ensuring that assets are used for the benefit of the community.

CICs can have paid directors. To register a new CIC, you have to apply to Companies House to register a company, and include with your application form CIC36, which you will use to describe how your company will benefit the community.

For more information on legal structures, please see the 'more information' page at the end of this guide for more resources and links to other organisations for support.

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When deciding on an organisational structure for your group there are lots of considerations to be made and it is worth exploring all your options to make sure you make the right choice. It is possible to transfer from one structure to another, but this is generally expensive and/or time consuming so it's better to get it right first time. It is strongly recommended that appropriate advice is sought from a specialist such as those listed on page 12 to avoid any pitfalls and potentially save time and money too.

# Case Studies

To help inspire you, we've put together a range of case studies from groups across Suffolk and beyond, who are taking action against climate change. Each group is unique in the projects they offer but all of them promote sustainability and the need to reduce our carbon footprints.

## Transition Woodbridge, Suffolk

Transition Woodbridge is a community-led group that aims to strengthen the local economy, reduce the cost of living and prepare for a future with less oil and a changing climate.

The group deliver a range of different projects including:

- **Borrow Bags** - if shoppers forget their re-usable bags, they can borrow a bag made that volunteers have made out of unusable material that is upcycled from worn shirts, sheets, curtains etc. The shopper then returns their borrowed bag to the shop next time they visit.
- **Community Fruit Tree Harvesting** - volunteers are able to visit a local smallholding and pick fruit that would otherwise rot and go to waste. The produce is then distributed to local charities including New Horizons and Salvation Army, and Woodbridge and Melton St Andrews lunch clubs.
- **Repair Cafe** - on the first Monday of every month, members of the community can bring broken items like a broken toaster, a lamp with a broken switch, or a piece of clothing that needs mending. Volunteers will then assess the item to see if it can be repaired, if it can, the item will be repaired straight away.
- **Mini nature reserves and re-wilding grass verges** - volunteers have been converting unloved corners of Woodbridge into wildlife havens by planting insect friendly plants. The beds are regularly maintained by volunteers.



## What is Transition?

Transition is a global movement that has been growing since 2005. It's about communities stepping up to address the big challenges they face by starting local. Across Suffolk there's a total of seven transition initiatives underway.

# Case Studies

## Cookpole Energy Action, Suffolk

Cookpole Energy Action (CEA) is a charitable company that was established in July 2009, following a talk to local residents about what they could do to save energy, energy costs and carbon emissions. A group of residents felt more could be done, as a community, alongside the actions we can all take as individuals and households.

Since then, the group have successfully taken on a range of projects including:

- **Electric Bikes** - in 2015 CEA secured grant funding to buy two electric bikes and a metal storage shed for them. When they are 'at home' the batteries are recharged using solar power. If you live locally, you can borrow these bikes, free of charge. If you are visiting the area, you can hire them for a small fee. The bikes have been hired for a variety of reasons including to use instead of own cars, to try out with a view to buying one of their own, as part of a rehabilitation programme following major accidents or surgery, and for pleasure and gentle exercise.
- **Solar Panels** - in 2013, CEA successfully raised enough funds to install a 4kW solar array on the roof of Walpole Pavilion. The panels provide approximately 3,000kWh of electricity per year which is used to recharge the electric bikes, and power the building.

To raise money for their projects, CEA host an annual Winter Craft Fair with 36 stallholders selling a selection of crafts and produce by local makers.



## Transition Sudbury and District, Suffolk

Transition Sudbury and District was set up in 2010 to encourage sustainable living and reduction of carbon emissions. The group host film showings, guided walks, visits to environmental schemes, debates on energy issues, alongside other organised events including:

- **Skills-share classes** - members of the group offer to share their skills in subjects as wide-ranging as bread-making, basic cookery, chicken-keeping, composting, vegetable-growing, and Christmas wreath-making.
- **Give and take events** - residents are able to bring their unwanted, but useful, household and garden items for those in need to take away.

# Case Studies

## Greener Fram, Suffolk

Greener Fram is an unincorporated association that started in 2008, after two residents attended a talk about climate change. The residents were so impressed with the information given and the need for action that they decided to do something about climate change locally and created Greener Fram. In 2010 Greener Fram affiliated itself with the Transition movement and were awarded a Greenest County Award. Activities include:

- **The Free Food Shed** - the community are able to donate unwanted food as long as it is in good condition and well wrapped, including surplus allotment produce, unwanted food presents, and home-made jam. Anyone in the community can then take the food for free.
- **Swap and Mend** - held six times a year, residents can bring unwanted goods and swap them for something else, or donate an item you no longer require, or you can just come and take away items for free. In 2015, for a second time, Greener Fram won the Greenest County Waste and Recycling Award for their Swap or Mend events.



## Green Energy Nayland, Suffolk

Green Energy Nayland is a community enterprise, incorporated as an Industrial and Provident Society with the aim to generate renewable energy in and for the community of Nayland through funding, and installing and operating renewable energy solutions.

Their first project was to install solar panels on Nayland Primary School to generate at least 30% of the school's electricity. The installation consisted of 84 panels with a peak capacity of 15.54kW. The capital cost was raised through a community share offer with profits shared out between investors.

Green Energy Nayland have gone on to complete a further two projects with solar installations at Ferrier's Barn Day Centre, and Colchester Community Solar Farm.

The group have also produced [this guide](#) detailing the processes they went through to get their first project off the ground.

# Case Studies

## Happy Planet Heroes, Suffolk

Happy Planet Heroes is an unincorporated association in Bury St Edmunds for people who are interested in learning about a low carbon lifestyle. They also have information on petitions, local policies and national initiatives that members can get involved with. Formed in 2019, this group hold monthly meetings where they:

- Learn more about low carbon living.
- Encourage members to calculate their ecological/carbon footprint and pledge an action to reduce it.
- Encourage local and national policy makers to take more urgent and effective action on the climate and ecological crisis we are facing.
- The founders of the group have also started producing their own podcasts with tips to live a more sustainable lifestyle.



For more examples of how communities in Suffolk are driving the change toward net zero, see the [Green Suffolk website](#).

## Histon and Impington, Cambridgeshire

Histon and Impington Sustainability Group began in 2018 and run a number of regular events including vegan feasts, film screenings, and talks. In addition to these, they also run larger projects including:

- **HI Trees** - currently underway, this project will create new woodland at the entrance to the village by planting 1,000 trees. Histon & Impington Youth Eco-Council have designed the logo and will help out with various tasks, including planting. The new woodland will provide a field site for long-term engagement of school and youth groups, so that children can learn first-hand about biodiversity management and taking measurements to estimate carbon storage. HI Trees will also be working with the junior school during their environmental term to demonstrate the benefit of trees and hedgerows, and involve the children in planning and planting to combat pollution.
- **Hedgehog Highways** - hedgehogs are in steep decline and the biggest danger facing them is the loss and fragmentation of their habitat. This project encourages residents to make a small hole in their fence, digging a tunnel underneath, or ensuring there is a route in and out of their garden.

# Case Studies

## Reepham Low Carbon Communities Challenge, Norfolk

In 2004, the Reepham Green Team was established and one of their first actions was to undertake a comprehensive community carbon audit. The seven page survey was completed by nearly a quarter of all households in a single day. The audit was analysed by CRed at the University of East Anglia and the results showed that Reepham's carbon emissions per capita were 48% above the national average. As part of the carbon audit, members of the Reepham community made CRed carbon reduction pledges amounting to 127 tons CO<sub>2</sub> per year. Among other projects, in 2012 the group received £110,000 from the Local Energy Assessment Fund to deliver five projects:

- **Reepham Town Hall** - internal refurbishment to include internal solid wall insulation
- **Reepham Primary School** - refurbishment of Primary School canteen block to include external solid wall insulation and installation of a ventilation and heat recovery system
- **Wood Fuel Club / Norfolk Wood Warm CIC** - establish a wood fuel club and not-for-profit enterprise (Norfolk Wood Warm CIC) to process and supply wood logs and wood chip of a known moisture content to local residents on a not-for-profit basis.
- **Reepham Liquid Biofuel Heating Feasibility Study** - looked at the viability of using waste vegetable oil to fuel domestic boilers, and also Reepham Primary School and Reepham High School.
- **Reepham Community Renewable Technology Feasibility Study** - looked at solutions and technologies to provide the community with heat &/or power.



## Swaffham Prior, Cambridgeshire

In an attempt to move the community away from oil and towards a renewable heat source for heating and hot water needs, the Swaffham Prior Community Land Trust approached Cambridgeshire County Council in 2017 for support for a district heat network with an energy centre. The project has been given planning permission, and County Council approval, with 160+ homes expressing an interest to connect to the scheme. It is anticipated that the scheme will be ready in 2021.

# More Information

This guide has been produced by Groundwork East on behalf of the [Suffolk Climate Change Partnership](#). The Partnership has a dedicated Community Advisor who will be able to support you and your group to achieve its environmental ambitions, whatever they may be.

Please contact Sarah Gill, on 07720 098980 or [sarah.gill@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:sarah.gill@groundwork.org.uk) for more information.

Alternatively, please visit the [Green Suffolk](#) website where you will find lots of information on how [individuals, communities and businesses](#) can reduce their carbon footprints. There's also relevant funding opportunities for each. For communities, the funding page is [here](#).

There are also a variety of other organisations able to provide support to you and your group including:

[Groundwork East](#) - Is a community and environmental charity working to change places and lives across the region. As well as running projects on the ground, they also manage a variety of grants on behalf of clients.

[Community Action Suffolk](#) - Offer expert advice, support and guidance to Suffolk's voluntary community and social enterprise sector. They can provide support on setting up, managing and developing your organisation and can be on a 1:1 basis, or through training sessions.

[Suffolk Pro Help](#) - Is a network of businesses who provide professional and strategic support free of charge to voluntary and community groups. The support available includes advice on legal, accountancy, architectural, marketing, and business.

[Funding4Suffolk](#) - Is an online search tool that allows you to search for funding for your project, organisation or group quickly and easily.

[Suffolk Community Foundation](#) - Provide open and accessible grant funding to smaller and medium sized charities, voluntary and community groups, and social enterprises.

[East Suffolk Greenprint Forum](#) - Is a voluntary network, facilitated by the district council, to help enable community environmental action to improve lives and strengthen our economy. Whilst their focus is on East Suffolk, anyone, anywhere can join for free to help inform and learn from their thinking.

[Charity Commission](#) - Models, templates and guidance for constitutions, articles of association and trust deeds for a new charity or charitable trust.

[Resource Centre](#) - This route map will help you work out what legal structure is right for you.

[My Community](#) - This website has a range of useful guides and information for setting up new groups and understanding governance.

[Co-operatives UK](#) - This guide provides a comprehensive overview of the different types of legal structure.